Interview with Mr. Mark E. Mohr , 2011

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

MARK E. MOHR

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: OK, today is 22 October 2009. This is an interview with Mark E. Mohr. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. And you go by Mark?

MOHR: Yes.

Q: Mark, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

MOHR: Brooklyn, New York, January 5, 1945.

Q: OK, let's take the Mohrs. What do you know about the background of the family?

MOHR: My parents were Jewish. Although my mother was born in New York City, her parents came to the United States from Bessarabia at the end of the 19th century. Bessarabia was then part of Romania, and is now the country of Moldova. My mother, who was born in 1906, had a difficult life, as her mother died during the influenza epidemic of 1919. She was the oldest child, so my grandfather told her, at age 13, that she now had to take care of him and her younger brother. Then my grandfather remarried. He eventually had five more children, and my mother had to take care of them as well. She

eventually had to drop out of school because of her responsibilities at home.My father was born in 1903 in Galicia, just outside of Cracow, which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and is now part of Poland. His life was no picnic either. He was a teenager during World War I (WWI). The Russians invaded his village, which was south of Cracow, captured the civilian population, and moved the people, including my father, his parents, and his two sisters and brother, to a Russian town called Ufa, which is at the foot of the Ural Mountains, on the European side. He said it wasn't that bad. There were some Red Cross inspections to monitor that the captives were well-treated, and the only problem, according to my father, was an occasional shortage of food. There was one incident, as told by my father, which scared me. He was walking with an adult who had a loaf of bread. My father heard a shot, and the man fell down, bleeding. “What did you do?” I asked my father. “I picked up the loaf of bread and ran,” he replied.

At the end of WWI my father and his family were repatriated back to their village. My father was now a citizen of Poland, as that country became reconstituted following the end of the war. One of the first foreign policy initiatives of the new Polish government was to declare war on Russia. My father received his draft notice. Deciding that he had already been a guest of the Russian government, and recalling he had an uncle in New York City, my father decided to go west rather than east. It was a wise decision. In 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland, the initial point of attack was southern Poland, in the Cracow area. If my father had not departed in 1921, there is little doubt that he would have been killed, most probably in the concentration camps, and I would have never been born.

Q: What did your father do?

MOHR: Because of World War I, he had no chance at an education. His uncle in New York owned a bar, and after my father arrived, he worked there for several years. Then he decided to learn a trade, and became a paperhanger. He decorated houses with wallpaper. He was quite skilled, and made a good living. My mother was a housewife. If you recall the television show Welcome Back Kotter, there were shots of an outdoor

market as the theme song played at the beginning of the show. That was the 86th Street market in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, where my mother did her food shopping every day for the evening meal.

Q: Is that the old Jewish neighborhood more or less?

MOHR: Yes. We lived on 81st Street, and it was a mixed Jewish-Italian (Sicilian) neighborhood. For whatever reasons, the Jews and Italians got along very well. Therewere never any fights. My best friend, who lived three houses down from me, was Nicky Manucci. I was always eating at Nicky's house, which annoyed my mother greatly. However, I definitely preferred Italian cooking to Eastern European cooking. In my mind, the latter's great mantra was “boil everything.”

Q: Let's talk about the early years. How big was your family? Your mother and father both died while you were quite young.

MOHR: I had a sister who was 16 years older than I, and a brother who was 14 years older. So my parents were fairly on in years when I was born. My sister married when I was five. My father died of a heart attack at the age of 52. I was 10 at the time. My mother died, also at the age of 52, two years later, of breast cancer. My sister and brother, unfortunately, are both deceased now as well.

Q: What sort of place did you live in?

MOHR: It was a lower middle class neighborhood in Bensonhurst.

Q: Was it an apartment?

MOHR: Yes, although most places on my street were one or two family houses, we lived in a three-story walk-up, on the first floor, in the back. I think the neighborhood now is mainly Russian-Jewish. After I left, the district was represented by Congressman Steven Solarz.

Q: I have interviewed Steve Solarz.

MOHR: I also took care of him several times during visits overseas; the last one was to Beijing in 1988. He really liked to do a lot, and it was a bit tiring escorting him on his many appointments.

Q: Do you recall as a kid, life in your neighborhood?

MOHR: Yes. In the 1950s television was still relatively new, and it was not on all day. The habit of just watching television was not yet ingrained. We would play outside a lot, on the street. It was great fun.

Q: So you played stick ball?

MOHR: Stick ball, and stoop ball as well. But mostly stick ball. When cars passed by, we would stop playing until they passed. After my mother passed away, I moved permanently to live with my sister in Elizabeth, New Jersey. On my first night after dinner, I hurried out on the street to meet and play with my new friends. I received quite a shock: there was no one out on the street. So even though I moved less than an hour by car from my home in Brooklyn, I knew I was in a different place, with a different culture.

Q: What sort of a place did your sister live in?

MOHR: My brother-in-law was a doctor, so they lived in a fairly spacious house in an upper middle class neighborhood, mostly doctors and lawyers. It was atypical of Elizabeth, as most of the town at that time was fairly shabby.

Q: As a kid were you much of a reader?

MOHR: Actually no, unless you count comic books. I loved Superman, Batman and especially Captain Marvel (Shazam!). I was particularly upset when Captain Marvel stopped publishing in 1955. I actually wrote a letter to the publishers of Captain Marvel,

and learned in their reply that they had been sued for plagiarism by the publishers of Superman. Amazingly, the latter won the lawsuit, and Captain Marvel had to stop publishing. At a young age then, I lost a little faith in the American judicial system. The lawsuit was ridiculous: aside from both being superheroes, Captain Marvel was nothing like Superman.

Q: In elementary school were you a good student?

MOHR: Oh yes, always. My sister and brother were not good students, so my parents were always very happy to receive my report cards. My sister always wanted to be a nurse, so she did well enough to get into nursing school, but she was never very academic. My brother, who was amazingly intellectual (no comic books for him), nevertheless liked to argue with his teachers, especially pointing out things that they said which he believed were incorrect. So he never got straight As, like I did.

Unfortunately, my academic ability, manifest at a young age because I could read by the time I was three or four, made my father decide that I had what it took to be a rabbi. I suppose this was very prestigious from his point of view. Accordingly, he decided that he would send me to Yeshiva, that is, orthodox Hebrew school, rather than send me to regular elementary school.

I have to interrupt the narrative at this point to relate an event that almost caused my death. At the age of five, my family and I were vacationing in the Catskill mountains, north of New York City. While playing in the woods, I was bitten by a bee, and developed a severe allergic reaction. I was hospitalized, and soon developed nephrosis. That is, my kidneys basically shut down. This was in 1950, and fortunately for me, a new medicine had been developed. It was called ACTH (adrenocorticotropic hormone). Unfortunately, it was very expensive, and my father could not afford it. Fortunately, my future brother-in-law was in residence at the hospital where I was, and he just took some ACTH from the medical supply room and provided it for me. The ACTH cured me, although it took almost a year.

Later I learned that most of the children on my ward died. They were in advanced stages of nephrosis before the ACTH became available. My brother-in-law told me that my case was written up in a medical journal. I was the first child to make a complete recovery from nephrosis.

So after recovering from the illness, I was off to Yeshiva. The hours were from 8am to 5pm daily, and there was tons of homework, including at least one hour per night of Hebrew memorization from the Old Testament. I really grew to dislike my school life a lot, so when my father passed at the end of sixth grade, I wasted no time insisting that my mother allow me to transfer to public school.

Q: Was this one place where as a little kid you are nodding your head back and forth.

MOHR: No, nodding you head back and forth is when you pray. As I said, there was a lot of memorization, so that was standing up and reciting like a robot. However, later in life I realized this trained me well for learning Chinese, my specialty in the foreign service, because that too required an incredible amount of memorization.

Q: Did the religion you were studying "take" in any way?

MOHR: Well, unfortunately it did, in a negative way. I didn't want to have anything to do with it afterwards. I was especially irked by the fact that, in orthodox Hebrew instruction, the student is not entitled to ask any questions until after his bar-mitzvah, at age 13. So all during elementary school, whenever I tried to ask a question, the teacher would explain that I had no right to ask the question! I naturally thought this was doctrinaire and ridiculous. Additionally, after all the long hours at school and doing homework during the week, I wanted to play on the weekend, especially sports. However, it was forbidden to play sports on Saturday, since this was the Jewish Sabbath. When I did play, I was usually reported and then reprimanded on Monday at school.

Q: What about growing up at a time when Israel was coming forth but at the same time a lot of ultra-orthodox Jews gave Israel the cold eye?

MOHR: My family was supportive of Israel. Ironically, they were definitely not supportive of the State Department. They thought the State Department's Middle East experts were pro-Arab and anti-Jewish, and they warned me never to join the State Department. My compromise was to join the State Department, but to work on U.S.-China foreign policy, rather than on the Arab-Israeli question.

Q: Well there are a lot of similarities between Jews and Chinese.

MOHR: True, both cultures emphasize family and food, as well as the value of an education. I could parachute tomorrow into downtown Beijing and feel very comfortable.

Q: Well let's move on. How old were you when you left elementary school?

MOHR: I was 10 when my father died, in 1955. I left yeshiva after sixth grade, and then entered public junior high school. It was called Seth Low junior high, named after a former mayor of New York City.

Q: How did you like that?

MOHR: I liked it a lot, but the problem was that my mother was dying of breast cancer, so when she was really sick, I had to move to my sister's home in New Jersey. When she felt better, I moved back to Brooklyn. I did this at least twice. Then, after I finished 9th grade in Brooklyn, she finally passed, and I spent the last three years of high school in Elizabeth, New Jersey with my sister and her family.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

MOHR: Thomas Jefferson High School in Elizabeth, New Jersey. It was a boys' high school. In Elizabeth at the time, there was one all-boys high school, one all-girls high

school, and a co-ed vocational school. I have no idea why, but that's the way it was. So I spent all three of my high school years in an all-boys institution.

Q: How did you find that?

MOHR: Lonely. One of the reasons was that I was younger than everyone else. In the tenth grade, I was 14. I graduated high school when I was 16. There were two reasons for this. First, I started school a bit early. Secondly, I essentially skipped eighth grade at Seth Low junior high school when I was in Brooklyn. Actually, I did so with my whole class. In those days in New York City, children were tested at the end of sixth grade. If you scored several years ahead in reading and math, you were placed in what was called a Special Progress (or S.P.) class. You and your classmates in junior high school stayed together as a class, but in the first year you were in 7 S.P., and the next year you were in 9 S.P. So, again I essentially skipped eighth grade. Fortunately, I had a best friend in high school, Howard Goldsweig. He went to private school, so we weren't classmates. But he lived across the street, and we spent almost every weekend together. He was even more shy than I was, so we never went out with girls.

Q: Didn't they have mixers and that sort of thing?

MOHR: Not that I remember. So when it got time to think about college, my main criterion was that it be coeducational.

Q: I went to an all male prep school and an all male college, and then spent four years in what was those days an essentially all male air force as an enlisted man. So the first co-ed school I went to was graduate school. I had always liked girls and so I sat next to the prettiest girl in class and 54 years later we still fit. We are still together.

MOHR: Wonderful, but rare. So I was really lonely in high school.

Q: By the time you got to high school were you able to get into New York or enjoy the movies or get around or do things.

MOHR: My sister sent me to this coeducational summer camp, so I met people there, including girls. I also met this fellow Alexander Berzin, from Paterson, New Jersey, and we became lifelong friends. During high school, we would meet on the average of one Sunday a month in New York City, and spend time hanging around Greenwich Village, going to the folk song cafes, etc. Later, we were roommates in graduate school. Alex is now a Tibetan Buddhist monk and scholar. He has written five books on Tibetan Buddhism, and after living for 30 years in Dharamsala, India, he now lives in Berlin.

Q: Was there anything like books or music that attracted you?

MOHR: Well, I really liked rock and roll music, but as I said, books did not attract me particularly. At the time, although I was good in most subjects at school (except physics), I was really scared because I had no idea what I wanted to do, and didn't have a clue about a possible major in college. My brother was a psychologist, so I told people I wanted to be a psychiatrist, because that seemed to sound good. So when I went to college, at the University of Rochester, I put down psychology as my major. Then in my second year, I took statistical psychology, and really hated it. There were all these different tests for everything, and it seemed like you could choose the test to fit the data.

Q: Yeah.

MOHR: This struck me as wrong, if not downright immoral. So by the end of my sophomore year, I had no major, no interest in anything specific. I didn't know what I wanted to do. So then I thought well, I always wanted to live in Paris. So I went to the French department and told them I wanted to spend my junior year abroad in Paris. I needed their permission to go to Paris.

Q: What was the University of Rochester like other than cold?

MOHR: Exactly. In my senior year, the student body voted overwhelmingly to move the campus to Miami. We used to say there were two seasons: winter and the 4th of July. One time, after spring break, I took a bus back to school and when I got close to campus, it started snowing.

Q: What about your plan to go to Paris?

MOHR: What I had not realized was that the French department had not had a male majoring in French for more than a decade. So when I walked in, they were quite happy. However, they insisted that in order to receive their permission to go to Paris, I had to declare French as my major, and graduate as a French major. It seemed like a good deal, so I signed. It turned out well. I liked Paris a lot. I didn't study much, but I learned French by osmosis.

Q: Going back to the start of your college years, had the outside world intruded at all?

MOHR: Not really. I vaguely recall as a little boy being worried that my brother would be drafted into the Korean War, but he wasn't. I believe it was because of poor eyesight. My first “outside” world recollection growing up was Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1952.

Q: Did the Nixon-Kennedy election hit you?

MOHR: That was when, 1960? Not a lot. I would say the first thing that really hit me was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Basically, I thought I was going to die and I didn't think that was fair, as I was only a sophomore in college and hadn't had much of a life to that point.

Q: In Paris, were you with a group from Rochester?

MOHR: No, I was by myself. The French department wasn't exactly a thriving concern, so I was by myself.

Q: A friend of mine who just recently died, Bill Morgan, was graduated much earlier than you from Rochester. He ended up as consul general in Paris and Montreal. He went to the Sorbonne actually.

MOHR: Well, I will tell you that when I left Paris, my French pronunciation was very good. I actually took a class in phonetics, and practiced a lot. Perhaps this was because while I was at college in Rochester, I was made aware that I had a Brooklyn accent, so I was determined to speak French properly, without an accent.

Q: Well then while you were in France, other than the language, what were you getting out of it?

MOHR: First a Norwegian girl friend, and when she left, a Swedish girl friend. I was very popular with the Scandinavians. Parisians are not going to talk to you unless you speak French really well. I lived in an apartment on the Left Bank with two other American guys, so initially all we could do was hang around the international community.

Q: You were there 1962-63?

MOHR: 1963-64. That academic year.

Q: Just to get a feel for the times, how did the assassination of President Kennedy hit you? Do you recall that?

MOHR: Oh, yes. It hit me hard. For the first (and only) time, French people would stop you in the street, ask if you were American, and then offer their condolences.

Q: Well you came back from France...

MOHR: Yes, and I came back with the knowledge that I was really good at learning foreign languages. At Rochester, when I first took French, I didn't excel, and I thought I had no special gift for languages. In high school, I took four years of French, but it was with a spinster Irish-American woman, and she seemed to enjoy failing students more than seeing students learn. In any case, there was no speaking, so I thought I couldn't do it. But after Paris, I wanted to learn more languages. I knew English, Hebrew, and now French. I decided that I would go onto graduate school and study comparative literature, and also decided it would be fun to add an Asian language. Since I grew up in New York City and was fascinated by Chinatown, I enrolled in an intensive Chinese language course at Harvard the summer I returned from Paris. It was really hard, but I felt positive and challenged. So in my senior year at Rochester, I took all these French courses, so I could get credit for Paris and graduate on time, and I also took a Chinese language course. Because of the Sputnik crisis, there was fellowship money to study Chinese, and I was accepted to almost every place I applied: Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Stanford and Berkeley. Ironically, I had one rejection, the University of Hawaii. I never understood that. In any case, I chose Harvard.

Q: So you graduated from the University of Rochester in 1965. Then you went to Harvard in Chinese studies. You were there for how long?

MOHR: I went there for two years, for a master's degree in modern Chinese history.

Q: How did you find Harvard?

MOHR: Really difficult. It was an unusual situation. For the first time, I really, really enjoyed what I was studying. But I hated the place where I was studying. I really hated it. At Harvard, they would take about 20 people in the master's program, and then they would try to pressure you as much as possible to see if you were “tough” enough to take it: they wanted just a few people for the doctoral program. So there was no encouragement, no kind words. I didn't function well in that kind of environment. It got so bad that by

my second year, I was so nervous that I couldn't eat solid food. I survived on instant breakfasts until I realized I needed to leave. Then I did a paper on the China experts in the foreign service, the “Old China Hands” as they were called, the ones who got in all that trouble during the McCarthy era for predicting that Mao Zedong and the communists would triumph over our ally, Chiang Kai-shek.

Q: Well it sounds like you were going through the Jewish education and all; you were a built-in sufferer weren't you?

MOHR: Not to that degree. The pressure at Harvard was really too much for me. I had a friend from Rochester who was in Chinese studies at Berkeley, and they were encouraging him to stay, treating him like he was special, asking him about his feelings. At Harvard, no one cared about your feelings. I knew from writing to my friend at Berkeley that I had chosen the wrong school.

Q: Reading about the China Hands and all....

MOHR: It was for a seminar paper at the beginning of my second year at Harvard. After doing the paper, it all clicked. I knew I wasn't fit for the doctoral program. In addition to not liking all the pressure, I really didn't like sitting in a library for eight to ten hours a day doing research. I wanted to do something, to have a career and have the academics interview me and write about me. So in doing the paper on the China experts in the foreign service, I decided I wanted to be like them and join the foreign service, except obviously to try and avoid being persecuted like they were during the McCarthy period. And it turned out well. I really liked being a foreign service officer. I got to be a China hand for my generation, to work for a few decades on building a relationship between the United States and China. It was really rewarding work, because we really did achieve something. When I was growing up, it was against the law to even talk to someone from the Chinese mainland. Now there are thousands of contacts, and so much more understanding. I helped contribute to that. I really feel a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Q: You need to explain because people are going to be reading this and we know but could you explain what the China Hands and the old China hands were?

MOHR: Before World War II (WWII) we had consulates in every province in China. The embassy was in Nanking, which was Chiang Kai-shek's capital. We had a consulate-general in Beijing, which was then known as Peking. So the pattern for many American experts on China was as follows. You would be born of missionary parents in China, attend school there through high school and go to college in the U.S. After graduation, you would join the foreign service and then return to China. You could spend your whole career in China, since there were over two dozen posts. Of course, that's one of the reasons why the Old China Hands were criticized so much during the McCarthy era. They were accused on not being “American” enough, because of their rather unique backgrounds.

In my opinion, these China experts were just doing their jobs. They reported accurately on the Chinese civil war between the communists and our allies. They analyzed the situation and concluded that since Mao had the support of the peasants, who made up well over 95 percent of the population, and Chiang had the support of business circles and industrialists, who made up a small fraction of the population, that Mao would win. For these predictions, they were persecuted by McCarthy and fellow witch-hunters. They were accused of pro-communist and anti-American sympathies, and even of lending support to the communist enemy. It didn't help that once Mao and the communists won, they kicked out the missionaries, so the entire U.S. Christian church community joined the hunt to find out “Who lost China?” (That is to say, looking for scapegoats regarding who was responsible for China becoming communist and thereby being “lost” to the U.S. as a friendly nation.) Almost all the Chinese language officers in the foreign service lost their jobs, having had their security clearances taken away from them. I would note here that their employers, the Department of State, did little to defend them. When I joined the foreign service in 1969, I was very surprised because there were very few senior China

specialists. I should not have been surprised. Between 1952 and 1969 very few people wanted to go into the China field because it was, to say the least, not career enhancing.

Q: Also there was nowhere to go.

MOHR: Well you could go to Taiwan, and I believe, Hong Kong.

Q: You go to Taiwan or Hong Kong. Then they would have people in other places in Asia too, the China watchers, but looking at people interested in it later when they see this transcript, there is a long oral history which is done at the University of California at Berkeley by John Stuart Service.

MOHR: That is correct. I met Mr. Service in 1969. On the way back home from Peace Corps Korea, I stopped off in Berkeley because my best friend from Rochester was doing graduate work there. Since I was in Berkeley, I sought out Service, and met with him. He informed me that his son was in the foreign service, but his son's languages were Spanish and Portuguese. He said that was a hint.

Q: It is really an excellent oral history. I highly recommend it to anybody to get a feel for it.

MOHR: OK. Afterward, please show me how to access it. I have one additional point I would like to make. I think there needs to be a serious study on how having no one really in the U.S. government who knew anything about China negatively impacted our assumptions at the time of the Vietnam War. Our national leaders thought China was behind North Vietnam's aggression, that it was all a communist plot—just as the Soviet Union wanted to control all of Europe, so China wanted hegemony over Asia. Ho Chi Minh was Mao's younger brother, so to speak, and he was taking orders from Mao. The fact that it was basically a Vietnamese civil war didn't seem to enter anyone's mind, nor did anyone seem to know that over the past millennium China and Vietnam had fought 58 major wars. The basic feeling between the two countries was enmity, despite their both having communist governments. Vietnam, being much smaller, certainly never really trusted

China. I believe the fact that there were no China experts in the State Department to argue forcefully against the “common knowledge” at the time was an incredibly important factor in getting us so deeply into the mess of the Vietnam War. I will never forget in 2004 I attended an international conference in Hanoi. I sat by a senior Vietnamese foreign ministry official, and for three days, during the breaks, he constantly harangued me as follows: “Why do you pay so much attention to China? We Vietnamese are important. You should pay more attention to us, and less to China. We want more trade with you. You don't listen to us. You ignore us. We want more trade with you.” Such an attitude was perfectly foreseeable if anybody had had half a brain in 1965. But we were still traumatized by the rise of Soviet communism at the end of WWII, and the trauma increased with the “loss” of China to the communists in 1949. One effect was the loss of a great deal of China expertise within the U.S. government for a generation, and it is my contention that the loss led directly to the ignorance and ignorant assumptions that lay at the core of our Vietnam policy and the Vietnam War.

Q: Did you get your master's degree from Harvard?

MOHR: Yes.

Q: In 1967?

MOHR: Right. But by the time I received my master's degree, I had already passed the foreign service exam.

Q: You took the written exam. How about the oral exam. Any questions on how it went?

MOHR: Well, as they say, it's better to be lucky than good. I took the foreign service exam either at the end of 1966 or the beginning of 1967. In any event, the Cultural Revolution was raging in China, and many in the U.S. were extremely interested in what was going on in China. I felt that my examiners, instead of grilling me, were just happy to ask me questions about what was going on in China, and let me answer them. I was

quite practiced in doing so, because Harvard had a speaker's program and we graduate students would speak about China in Boston and other venues throughout the state. Apparently, I impressed the examiners sufficiently to pass. I assume they made the judgment that the foreign service needed more people who were knowledgeable about China. So I was lucky, because a few years earlier they would not have made such a determination.

Q: We are so off the subject but how about the Vietnam War? How did the Vietnam War stand with you draft wise or your feeling about the war at the time?

MOHR: Since I felt we were in Vietnam for all the wrong reasons, I did not want to go to Vietnam. Graduate school offered me the opportunity for a deferment, as did the Peace Corps. Once I joined the foreign service, I was safe again from being drafted.

Q: Well let's talk about the Peace Corps then. You started in '67?

MOHR: Right, 1967 to 1969. I applied for the Peace Corps while still in graduate school, at the same time I applied to the foreign service. I felt that I first wanted to learn about Asia from the ground up, so to speak, and that going into the Peace Corps would be excellent training for the foreign service. Since it was impossible to go to China at the time, I applied for South Korea, as the nearest country available with a Confucian culture, and was accepted. I was a member of the third group to go out to Korea.

Q: How did you get in? How did they train you? How did you sign up for that?

MOHR: Well, when I filled in the application, they asked for your preferences. During our three-month training period, I found out that among the 120 trainees there, only three had asked for Korea. Apparently, most wanted to go to Latin America, especially Brazil. So those of us who had asked for Korea were pretty much assured of going there. During the training, approximately one-third were “selected out,” and did not get the opportunity to go. Unfortunately, not all those selected out were eliminated for the right reason. Incredibly, in

1967, despite the U.S. having spent more than three years fighting the Korean War in the early 1950s, almost no one knew anything about Korean culture. Proof of this was that our main book in training, selected as the core for our cultural studies about Korea, was Ruth Benedict's The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, which is about Japan!

Apparently, the assumption was that Japanese and Koreans were basically the same. Thus, many people were selected out of training because they were too loud or too aggressive. Perhaps they would not have fit into Japanese society, but they certainly would have fit in well in Korean society. They were never given the opportunity. Most of the quiet, sensitive types were allowed to go to Korea, and many of them only lasted a few months, because Koreans happen to be more to the opposite of those quiet and sensitive type personality traits. When I arrived in Korea, I tried to reign in my personality because I had been told in training Koreans were quiet and passive. I taught English at a middle school in Korea, and the first night out with my teachers, they were shouting, singing, making a lot of noise, banging on their rice bowls with their chopsticks, and aggressively flirting with the waitresses. I knew then, over the course of the evening, that our whole training program was wrong. They trained us for the wrong country. Whoops!

Q: I am no cultural expert but I was in Korea in the Air Force as an enlisted man. The thing I liked about the Koreans was we ate with the Korean Air Force. We were all together and if you shoved in the chow line they shoved back. It was great; some people call them the Irish of the Far East.

MOHR: So true. The Koreans are up front. They are frank and they are honest. Now some people may not like that, but I did.

Q: Well I found it refreshing. Again as an enlisted man in Japan I was always hankering for Korea. I was there you might say in the worst of times because the war was on.

MOHR: You were there during the Korean War?

Q: Oh yeah.

MOHR: Oh wow!

Q: Yeah I was there in 1950 or 1951. I had taken Russian and we were monitoring the Soviet Air Force.

MOHR: So where were you based?

Q: I was based at Yan Se. We ate at Iwa. We were bused over to Iwa. And I spent a month up on Chonu Island. You probably don't know where that is.

MOHR: Weren't you glad you weren't in the infantry?

Q: Yes. Chonu was up off Yung Yung Poo, It was during the war we held those islands, so it was up in the Yellow Sea off North Korea.

MOHR: Really?

Q: Yeah, we were in, we had a British cruiser in the channel there. But as I said thousands of Americans had gone to Korea during the war. I mean if Stu Kennedy could come out with this impression, what the hell....

MOHR: One of the many things wrong with the training program—only this time through no fault of Peace Corps administration— was that at the time no volunteers had yet completed their two-year tours of duty. When they did, some went into training, and of course one of the first things they did was to hammer home the fact that Korea was quite different from Japan. The drop-out rate started to decline.

Q: Well that is as it should be. Ok, you had this...

MOHR: So I went directly from Peace Corps into the foreign service.

Q: OK, but let's talk about your time in the Peace Corps. What did you do? You were there for two years.

MOHR: I taught English conversation in Taegu, South Korea. Taegu is in the south, only an hour from Pusan by train. In other words, I was going to go to Korea, but I wasn't going anywhere close to the demilitarized zone. If there was going to be another invasion, I wanted to make sure I could make a safe getaway.

Q: Well Taegu, that was where the naval academy was, wasn't it?

MOHR: No, that is Masan.

Q: We don't have a map but..

MOHR: (going to the map of Asia on the wall) Here on this map, here is Taegu, and the naval base is over here.

Q: What was the city like?

MOHR: Well it was a big city, as opposed to most of the villages where the majority of Peace Corps volunteers were based. Coming from New York City, I wanted to be in a city. Also, the allies had stopped the North Korean invasion in 1950 just north of Taegu, so the city had not been destroyed during the Korean War. But it was still very poor at the time. Most people did not have indoor plumbing. Taegu at the time I was there was a dusty, dirty city of about one million people.

Q: So you taught English?

MOHR: Just English, yes. During the first year, I taught at a middle school, first year English. But English is a hard language for Koreans to learn, because it is so different from their language. So in a year, if you can teach them to respond to “Are you a boy?” by saying “Yes, I am,” rather than “Yes, she does,” you're making progress. I did not want to

go through this for a second year, however, so I asked to be transferred to a university, where I could actually talk to my students in English.

Q: Did you find the university students were more responsive?

MOHR: Yes, the students could speak some English.

Q: The classes tend to be very big.

MOHR: Yes, in middle school anyway. I mean there were 20-30 in university, but in middle school there were 60 in a class. It was a challenge to try to teach 60 in a class. One interesting thing is that Koreans, like most Asians, are used to being in a crowded society, so they have learned not to take up much space. You could only fit about 30 Americans into the class size occupied by 60 Koreans.

Q: How did you find them as students in the middle school?

MOHR: They were energetic and hard working students. But it was frustrating because their progress was so slow. Now they begin English in the third grade, not in seventh grade, so by the time they are in junior high school, they have a working knowledge of English.

Q: How well were you accepted by the faculty at the school?

MOHR: I think most of the English teachers felt I was a threat, because I was a native speaker. But I had a co-teacher Mr. Lee Sang-mu, who was one of the finest human beings I have ever met. He was kind and understanding, and I don't know if I could have survived Korea without him. He loved the English language, and had a book containing Churchill's speeches, which he kept next to him on his desk. After I had been in Korea a few weeks, I noticed his eyes were moist. I asked him if he was upset. He replied, on the contrary, that he was very happy. He told me that it was his fondest desire to improve his English, but he never dreamed that he would be able to have an American sitting next to

him for two years, so that whenever he had a question about English, he could just ask. We lost contact for many years, but about 12 years ago we got in touch again, and we have continued to write letters to each other. He is 85 and doesn't like e-mail.

Q: Did you make progress in Korean?

MOHR: Oh yes, although it took almost a year until I was comfortable. We only had 12 weeks of language training, and Korean is a very different language from English. So that added to the strains of the first year. In addition to the new surroundings and the food, you couldn't communicate much to people beside basic baby talk. You felt like a complete idiot, and most Koreans you met had never met anyone who couldn't speak Korean, so they were a bit puzzled as to why you couldn't communicate with them. You were always wondering if they thought you were a bit retarded.

Q: Were you ever in contact with the embassy?

MOHR: Once or twice, because when I was in Peace Corps, I had already passed the foreign service exam, so I was curious what life in the foreign service was like. I met some people at the Embassy in Seoul, and had lunch with one of them and dinner with another.

Q: How did you find the administration direction of the Peace Corps while you were there?

MOHR: Quite good. Kevin O'Donnell was the head of Peace Corps Korea, and he later became director of the entire Peace Corps. He was a very good director. Mel Merkin was our regional director for southeast Korea. He was based in Taegu, and easy to talk to. He was a very kind fellow. He was a lawyer who decided he didn't like practicing law anymore. He wanted to do something different. So we had adult supervision and it was pretty good, pretty caring.

Q: Did you come away form the Peace Corps with a positive view about the program?

MOHR: Most definitely. I mean, the thing that bothered me the most had been our training, but that was corrected. A lot of the people from my group, K-III (the third group to go to Korea) went into training. I went into the foreign service, but through the years and various Peace Corps reunions, I heard stories from people in K-III about their various experiences training other Peace Corps groups. As for having been in Korea, I was very grateful. It accomplished its initial purpose: after surviving various parasitic infections and getting used to an outside toilet in the winter time, the little administrative and housing problems you incur in the foreign service did not seem so important. Also, I really have a warm feeling for the Korean people, and a special feeling for my co-teacher, Mr. Lee Sang-mu.

Q: Ok, well I am looking at the time and this might be a good place to stop, and we will pick this up the next time.

MOHR: That's fine, we're at the point where I've just finished Peace Corps and am about to enter the foreign service.

Q: Ok, we will pick it up then.

MOHR: That is good. Thanks, Stu.

Q: OK, today is October 29, 2009, I am Charles Stuart Kennedy, and this is Mark Mohr. When did you come into the foreign service?

MOHR: It was the fall of 1969, I believe in October.

Q: So let's talk a little bit about your foreign service class, A-100.

MOHR: The A-100 class. I think there were 36 in the class. There was a controversial element which I think was interesting, in that most of the people entering the class received literature from the foreign service a few months before they entered. I was actually in Korea when I received my letter, saying there that there were slots available

in Vietnam. (I remember the acronym for the assignment, CORDS (civil operations and revolutionary development support), but I don't remember what it stood for, but it was something to do with assisting in local economic development in the countryside.) The letter said if you volunteered for CORDS, you could join the foreign service immediately, but if you didn't sign up for CORDS, there was no telling when slots would be available, as hiring in the regular foreign service was very difficult at the moment.

I thought about it for a few days, and finally decided that I would not accept the offer to go to Vietnam. For reasons I explained previously, I felt we were in Vietnam for all the wrong reasons. Now, there were 36 people in our class that October and it turned out over half of them were going to Vietnam in CORDS because they had agreed to the offer. But the remainder of the class, including myself, had declined the offer but had been accepted into the Foreign Service anyway, at the same time as those who had volunteered for CORDS. So those going to Vietnam were not happy about what they perceived as having been tricked, but there was nothing they could do about it. As to the class itself, we were almost all against the Vietnam War, and during weekends many would protest the war. We would protest for awhile, then when we got cold, we would use the foreign service lounge on the first floor in Main State to warm up, and then we would go out and protest again. Overall, I enjoyed the six weeks of training.

Q: While you were in training , I was actually in Vietnam at the time. I was consul general in Saigon.

MOHR: Sorry.

Q: That was the beginning of the Vietnamization. We were withdrawing our troops at that point.

MOHR: Still there were an awful lot of U.S. troops in Vietnam.

Q: Was there much talk about the Vietnam?

MOHR: Yes there was. As I just stated, many in the class participated in protests. I remember very sadly there was someone at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) who had been the Vietnamese desk officer at some point in the late 1940s, I believe. I think his name was Paul Kattenberg. Anyway, he wrote a big policy paper arguing we should not pick up France's imperial burden, and should let Vietnam be independent. He was ignored, of course. Paul continued to protest the Vietnam War in the 1960s, and as a reward for his efforts he was permanently exiled to FSI. Somehow, Paul was allowed to address our A-100 course. I was fascinated, and had a private meeting with him. It was very moving, very sad, and it was a good warning about what could happen to your career if you strayed from political correctness. Kattenberg said that almost everyone involved in Vietnam had been promoted, while most of those who protested the policy had their careers derailed.

Q: Yes, I have interviewed him.

MOHR: All right. So that was eye-opening. I made some friends in the A-100 course, and I enjoyed learning about the various parts of the U.S. government.

Q: So did you have any goal in mind on where you wanted to go?

MOHR: Of course. I wanted to be a “new” China hand. I wanted to get advanced Chinese language training, and be a political officer in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, when I was sworn into the foreign service, it was one of those times of budget tightening. If you had passed your foreign language requirement, you could not go overseas. I passed in Korean, so I was first assigned to the operations center at State for a few months, and then to the Office of Southern African Affairs (AF/S) for about a year and a half.

Q: Well had you ever thought about Africa?

MOHR: No, and the big irony is that my son is an Africanist. He has a Ph.D. in African anthropology and teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to being assigned to AF/S, I had never thought about Africa, and had no particular interest in it. It was an

interesting time in 1969, though, to be on the Southern Africa desk. There was a bit of controversy, especially about the Ian Smith regime in Rhodesia, which I don't think we supported.

Q: Never.

MOHR: Right, OK. As the junior officer, one of my basic responsibilities was answering the mail. We received countless letters in support for the white-only apartheid regime in Rhodesia, demanding to know why the U.S. government was not backing Ian Smith. Since in my opinion these letters bordered on the racist, my initial replies were fairly confrontational. By the way, most of this “hate mail” came from southern California and Florida., apparently from retirees who had nothing better to do. I remember the deputy director counseling me, explaining that the purpose of the reply was to smother the writer with such blandness that he would get fed up with us and stop writing, not to incite him to reply again. I was told to create boilerplate language and repeat such language as much as possible. So this is what I did, but some of the letters were really vicious. One, for example, suggested we should use nuclear weapons on the black areas of South Africa and Rhodesia to teach them a lesson. What I wanted to reply was something along the lines of how would you like it if we machine-gunned your children. But I understood the point the deputy director was making, and I got pretty good at creating a multitude of blandly correct paragraphs, and then cutting and pasting as necessary.

Q: It reminds me of a Tom Wolfe story called Bow Wow and the Flak Catchers.

MOHR: I am not familiar with that title.

Q: It is essentially in the housing administration in San Francisco, where these big Samoans would come in, and they are big.

MOHR: Yes, I know about Samoans. They are Polynesians, and most Polynesians are big.

Q: Yes, and they would come and lean over the desk and they would be up against the flak catcher. He was a guy with horn rimmed glasses and some pencils sticking out of his pocket and all. He would listen to these guys screaming and yelling and reply in very dulcet tones about well we will look into that and thank you very much. That was his job, to catch flak. The Polynesians were "mau mauing," which was trying to scare the hell out of him.

MOHR: So anyway I spent my time basically doing the office correspondence. I also was in charge of clearances throughout the building for policy papers. I would take, for example, a dozen of these long papers in shopping baskets and wheel them around the building, dropping them off in the various offices as required. Then I would follow up on the phone and bug the offices for their clearances. After about a year of this, with about six months to go on my assignment, I got a call from my personnel officer. He said they had a job for me in Taiwan. I was excited. I asked about the job, and he said it was to be the non-immigrant visa officer. I had no idea what the job was really like, but I told him I had two requirements. I wanted to be able to speak Chinese, and meet Chinese people. My personnel officer chuckled, and said those two requirements would surely be met. So I was very happy and thought the foreign service was the best. Of course I had no clue that in my desire to be a China expert, I would be starting at the very bottom, interviewing non-immigrant visa applicants.

It was not all the foreign service's fault that the job turned out to be so bad. Naturally, there was a lot of misrepresentation. People said they just wanted a tourist visa to go to the States, and then on day one after arriving in the U.S. would head over to the immigration and naturalization service (INS) and apply to adjust status to be an immigrant, to stay in the U.S. You knew this because every month copies of the INS application forms of people you had issued tourist visas to would appear on your desk. They were particularly noticeable because the INS adjustment of status forms were printed on blue paper. For the first several months of my job, I interviewed between 30-40 applicants per day. This

wasn't too bad. However, in October 1971, Taiwan got kicked out of the United Nations, as the People's Republic of China (PRC) was voted in. There was mild panic in Taiwan. People thought that it would be best, just in case China decided to invade, to have a tourist visa to the U.S. as insurance. So in a very short period of time, visa applications jumped from about 40 per day to over 160 per day. They quadrupled. And I was the only visa officer. We were a three-person office. Besides myself, there was the consul, a very kind-hearted man, and a very nice woman who did American citizen services. Occasionally, the consul, who spoke Chinese, would help out, but essentially I was on my own. After trying to get help, State replied that I would be replaced by two people when my tour ended, but because training took so long, I just had to hold the fort in the interim. It was very stressful, so I was extremely happy to see my tour end. I guess there is some benefit, when you're starting out your career, to have your worst job at the beginning.

Q: What was the sort of, I mean I realize you were besieged with your non-immigrants. What was the political situation in Taiwan in that period?

MOHR: Chang Kai-shek was president. It was a dictatorship, but it functioned fairly smoothly.

Q: Was there still the tremendous tension between the Kuomintang and the Taiwanese?

MOHR: Oh yes, most definitely. But the Taiwanese were allowed a safety valve in the business sphere. As long as they stuck to making money, they were fine. They were not allowed into politics, or into the military at the officer level; that was the purview of the mainlanders.

Q: Was there concern about the mainland Chinese invading. I mean real concern?

MOHR: Yes, there was concern, but for those without means, there was not much they could do. For those with means, it was time to get a U.S. visa.

Q: What language where you speaking, Mandarin, Cantonese, or Taiwanese?

MOHR: I spoke Mandarin. I later figured out that trying to communicate in Mandarin to the visa applicants was a bad idea, since they had the upper hand, since their language ability was obviously better than mine. So when I could, I used a translator, and then I could appear as the stony-faced higher official, rather than the hesitating person trying to speak their language.

Q: Was there much of a pressure group in the United States working on your visas, I mean Senators and so on?

MOHR: Yes. All the time, and it drove me crazy. For example, Taiwan had a law that if a male was 16 years old he couldn't go overseas until completing his required military service. So many 15 year-olds would apply to visit their grandmothers whom they had never known. I would reject these applicants. Then State would forward a letter from some Senator or Congressman, demanding to know why I had rejected the fine brother of some person who, while housing the grandmother, was probably not even a U.S. citizen. I wondered why the visa office at State, who knew the regulation regarding military service in Taiwan, would not answer the letter, but instead passed the buck to a junior officer.

Q: What about social life there?

MOHR: Let's see, I married someone I met in Peace Corps, just before entering the foreign service. My first child, Jennifer, was born on Taiwan, so that kept us busy. There was a large U.S. military presence, so you could use all their facilities, such as movies and the post exchange. My wife also got a job helping edit an English language magazine devoted to Chinese culture. Occasionally, we would take trips around the island.

Q: So you were on Taiwan until what, 1971?

MOHR: From 1971 to 1973. Things looked up as my next assignment was advanced language training in Taichung. That would get my ticket punched into the China club.

Q: This is still in Taiwan.

MOHR: Right. Taipei is on the northern part of the island, and Taichung is toward the center, on the western side. The school, which was run by the State Department but was actually the advanced Chinese language school for the entire U.S. government, was in Taichung at the time. After normalization with China, the school moved to Taipei.

Q: How did you find this year?

MOHR: I loved it. I had a house with a double yard, and one yard had a volleyball court. Every Saturday, I was host to my schoolmates, who came there to play volleyball and let off some steam. During the week, studying was intense. We had about five hours of class work and five hours of homework per day. The volleyball was a great outlet.

Q: So in 1974 you are off.

MOHR: Yes, after completing language training, I was assigned as a junior political officer in Hong Kong.

Q: While you were in Taiwan were you getting much news of what was going on in Indo China?

MOHR: Not really. In Taipei, I was just trying to survive the visa experience. In Taichung, I was studying all the time.

Q: So you went to Hong Kong when?

MOHR: In the summer of 1974.

Q: And you were there until when?

MOHR: For three years, from 1974-1977. I helped report on the death of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, Chairman Mao's death, the end of the cultural revolution, etc. I just loved the job. We read four to six Chinese newspapers a day, from the mainland and Hong Kong, read translated transcripts of provincial Chinese radio broadcasts, and talked to fellow China-watchers at other consulates and from the media. As we had only a small liaison office in Beijing, consulate Hong Kong produced a sort of Time Magazine weekly review of events in China. For some unknown reason, it was called the Weeka, and we went to press every Wednesday. We got it out before lunchtime, and then the political section would usually go to our favorite Italian restaurant in Hong Kong for pizza. At last, I was a real China-watcher, and I loved it. I could talk about Chinese politics all day long.

Q: Let's take your classic Chinese watcher. What were you watching and how do you do it, or did you do it?

MOHR: You read. You read the newspapers; you read the transcripts of the radio broadcasts, and you figured out, or you tried to figure out, what was going on with the leadership, who was in and who was out, what were the policies they were trying to pursue in the provinces, what were their economic policies, and of course what were their attitudes toward the U.S. It was all very analytical, and there was a lot of guess work, but for someone who up to that point had never had a “real” political job at an embassy, it was great fun. I was doing internal Chinese politics, so in my last year in Hong Kong, I switched to Chinese foreign policy so I could work on issues a little bit closer to more classic foreign service work, which centered on foreign policy issues and particularly the host country's attitude toward the United States.

Q: With regard to internal politics, had you had much experience in America following politics?

MOHR: No, not really.

Q: In Hong Kong, were you able to tap into the people who were coming out of China?

MOHR: The refugees?

Q: Yes.

MOHR: The British systematically interviewed them, and gave us copies of the interviews. But China was an elite communist political regime, and the refugees for the most part were in the same boat so to speak as we were: they had to guess at what was really going on. So the refugee debriefings were not all that useful, but they were interesting nonetheless. I recall that one woman refugee from Anhwei province, when asked in 1976 about the influence of the Cultural Revolution o her village replied, “What's the Cultural Revolution?”

Q: Well in Hong Kong were there people, like those on Taiwan, who were trying to prepare to leave if they had to. Was that going on in Hong Kong too?

MOHR: No. This was the mid-1970s, and Hong Kong was a British colony. The people of Hong Kong, although they didn't like the British, felt safe enough.

Q: Did you get any feel for a change in U.S. policy toward China, with the beginning of the Carter administration?

MOHR: Carter won the election in 1976. By that time, my tour was winding down, and in any case, I don't think we were privy to any sensitive negotiations of the time.

Q: I mean we had opened up with China. Did that play any role or was...

MOHR: Not much, because even though the U.S. liaison office (USLO) had opened, it was quite small. At the time, there was only a two-person political section, and its time was taken up mostly in the care and escort of visitors, so Hong Kong remained the basic

political reporting base for events in China. The Weeka continued. It was a little strange. The post hundreds of miles from the capital of China did the basic political reporting, and the post inside China did not.

Q: Well was the Gang of Four over doing its bit? What was happening?

MOHR: Mao died in September, 1976, and the Gang of Four, including Mao's wife, was arrested within one month of Mao's death. As a matter of fact, I entered China on the day the Gang of Four was arrested. Each of us in the political section was allowed one trip to visit our colleagues in USLO during our tour, and mine was scheduled for the fall of 1976. It was an interesting time to visit. There were wall-posters in all the cities celebrating the arrest of the Gang of Four. I traveled to Beijing from Hong Kong with my wife on the train. We stopped off for a day or two in Guangzhou (Canton), and then went directly to Beijing.

Q: Well after your time there, did you have any impression of how China might go after the death of Mao?

MOHR: Mao was initially replaced by Hua Guofeng, but he didn't last very long, and then Deng Xiaoping took over. Deng was certainly more pragmatic than Mao, and he knew how to develop and grow an economy. There was a misperception in the West that because we could understand (and approved of) his economic policies, that he was a moderate. This was incorrect. Politically, Deng believed in the dictatorship of the proletariat, led by the communist party. He was not a cute, cuddly little guy. He was a communist dictator. In the 1960s, there was a down-to-the-countryside movement when millions of college students were sent to the villages to “learn from the peasants.” Their academic lives were destroyed. Deng, not Mao, was behind the movement. Unlike Mao, however, Deng did believe that pragmatic economic development was important, so long as the Communist party maintained control.

Q: Did you get any feel of the central government and its rule, sort of the cadres running equivalent to the counties or not? Did the writ of Beijing run all the way to everywhere?

MOHR: No, in Hong Kong we really didn't get a feel for how policies played out at the local level. We were mainly studying the central leadership. It was a bit odd. We were living in this British colony, and we were the supposed experts on what was going on in China, even though there was a small U.S. liaison office in Beijing. We were the experts, but it was an academic kind of expertise.

Q: Did you feel that everything was in the hands of academics? You know academics have a tendency, a very strong tendency, to have firm ideas and often diverse ideas from each other. Was this sort of academic warfare sort of playing itself out?

MOHR: We weren't academics. Within the U.S. government (USG) in Washington, there were at times fierce disagreements on what was going on in China. Especially as the Sino-Soviet split built up, many within the USG failed to see this coming. Also, in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution, only a very few analysts believed Mao was not in full control of China. But in the political section in Hong Kong, while I was there, there were no such disagreements. For example, there was a political campaign in China starting in about 1973 that began as the anti-Lin Biao campaign. Let me explain here that Lin Biao was a very famous Chinese general, hand-picked by Mao to replace him. Lin reportedly betrayed Mao, was discovered, and was fleeing China to the Soviet Union, when his plane crashed and he died. Anyway, this anti-Lin Biao campaign soon morphed into an anti-Lin Biao, anti-Confucius campaign. We in Hong Kong reported that the anti-Lin Biao campaign had been an attempt by the conservatives within the Chinese government and party to attack the radicals, led by the Gang of Four. The Gang of Four tried to turn the tables, and began their own anti-Confucius campaign, with Confucius being the fairly obvious stand-in for then Premier Zhou Enlai. So it was a real battle, played out with a war of words daily in the media, between the Gang of Four's faction and Zhou En-lai's faction.

Ironically, Henry Kissinger, who then I believe was head of the National Security Council (NSC), was concerned that Zhou might be in political trouble, so he actually contacted Zhou and asked him. Of course Zhou replied that he wasn't being attacked, so Kissinger decided that our reporting to the contrary was all wrong. It didn't occur to Kissinger that Zhou was not admitting the truth. By this time, it was 1975. As Zhou Enlai remained in power, Kissinger and his people felt vindicated that our reporting was seriously misguided. As a matter of fact, one of Kissinger's senior aides in the State Department received a “courageous” reporting award for writing memos to him that Hong Kong's reporting was wrong and Zhou Enlai was not in any political trouble. It was only after Zhou died in early 1976, and following the purge of the Gang of Four that fall, that the Chinese media let loose with a torrent of reporting stating the evil Gang of Four and its followers had continuously attacked “beloved” leader Zhou Enlai during the anti-Confucius campaign. So history proved us right, but it was too late for us to receive any awards. At the time, all we received was criticism. But fortunately, there was no Senator McCarthy around, so no one really suffered. All that happened was that we didn't get promoted.

Another interesting reporting “moment,” I believe this was in 1975, occurred when the West German prime minister visited China. In a meeting with Mao Zedong, it was reported in the Chinese media that Mao said, when talking about Deng Xiaoping, that Deng “didn't listen to him anymore.” Now I recalled that when Deng Xiaoping had been purged during the Cultural Revolution, Chinese documents had claimed that one of the reasons for Deng's purge had been that he was arrogant, and didn't listen to Mao anymore. I thought that Mao telling a foreigner that Deng wasn't listening to him was very significant. So I wrote up a report stating that this indicated Deng was in political trouble. The problem was that there was no previous indication that Deng was in any political trouble whatsoever. So the political counselor, Don Anderson, who was my boss, said he did not want to send the cable. I rewrote it, and made it much more conditional. I said although this was merely a straw in the wind, it might be important, and we were reporting it so that the Washington

China community might factor this one tidbit into its analysis. As I was about to depart for home leave, Don said the cable looked OK and he would send it.

When I returned from home leave, I was surprised to learn that Don did not send the cable. He said upon reflection, it was just too “iffy,” and did not merit a report. A few months later, Deng Xiaoping was purged, and all the China-watchers in the Washington community came under severe criticism. There was even a study, launched I believe by the CIA, to find out why nobody ever reported that Deng Xiaoping was in trouble. Another possible moment of glory, and it passed me by.

Q: Well were you getting the feeling of reclusive scholars?

MOHR: Well, in a way, yes.

Q: But China really wasn't throwing its weight around the world in those days was it?

MOHR: No, except for supporting Vietnam.

Q: They were also doing things in Africa. I am not quite sure what that was all about.

MOHR: China was trying to use its influence to win support in the Third World, and not having a lot of money, I think they felt a little foreign aid could go a long way in Africa. They funded some major projects, such as the Tan-Zam railroad. They were also trying to compete with the Soviets. But because of the approximately 10 years of the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976, where they were almost totally focused on internal problems, their foreign policy and influence abroad was fairly limited.

Q: Were you a source for say the Japanese or the French or other people coming around and saying what is going on?

MOHR: Yes, we were. There were only a few serious China watching posts among the consulates in Hong Kong. Of course, the British has great resources, and the Japanese

put a lot of effort into China watching. Other than those two countries, other diplomatic posts were not serious China watchers, and drew much of their information from us. I was surprised that the Europeans, particularly the French and the Germans, just did not seem very interested in what was going on in China.

Q: Was anybody looking at the Chinese influence in other places, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and all that.

MOHR: In our political section, we had one Vietnamese language officer, to monitor Vietnamese influence in southeast Asia. Also, since we graduated more Chinese languages officers from school than there were postings, there were slots in various political sections in Indonesia and Malaysia for Chinese language officers to follow China's influence there.

Q: Yes, I think you are right. I have talked to people who were in Burma and Malaysia. Of course we had one who was doing something in Warsaw. But that was as a translator.

MOHR: Right. But in Hong Kong, in our political section, we had about a dozen people, and one slot designated for a Vietnamese language officer. When I was there, it was a fellow named Charlie Lahiguera. He had a very interesting background. His father had been a Spanish diplomat, who, in 1937, closed the Spanish embassy in Washington when Franco took over, and then asked for, and received, political asylum. So young Charlie then became an American citizen. We liked Charlie a lot, but our work rarely intersected, and he knew very little about China.

Q: Well had the Chinese Sino-Vietnamese war taken place while you were there?

MOHR: No, that took place in 1979, and by then I had left Hong Kong and had been assigned to Embassy Tokyo. The Sino-Vietnamese war was a brief affair, lasting only a few weeks. In the great words of Chinese propaganda, it was described as a “counter-attack in self-defense,” and their attack was necessary to “teach Vietnam a lesson.”

Vietnam had just concluded a mutual defense treaty with the Soviet Union, and the Chinese were incensed. They felt Vietnam was complicit in a Soviet attempt to surround them by hostile forces. In any event, by all U.S. military analysis, the battle-hardened Vietnamese roughed up the Chinese forces pretty badly, and the Chinese had to retreat. Publicly, of course, the Chinese claimed a great victory.

Q: Well you went to Tokyo when?

MOHR: I was there from the summer of 1977 to the summer of 1980. So I spent three years in Taiwan, two years as a vice consul and one as a language student, three years in Hong Kong as a junior political officer, and three years in Tokyo as a somewhat less junior political officer. I missed the 1970s in the U.S. I was overseas.

Q: OK, so we are now in 1977.

MOHR: Yes, in Tokyo.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MOHR: Former Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield. This was the first three years in what turned out to be a 12-year tour for Ambassador Mansfield. He was first appointed by President Carter, and then reappointed by President Reagan. So I was there in the early Mansfield years. I was lucky, because Mansfield was greatly interested in China, and I was the only China specialist at the Embassy.

Q: Yes, he had been a marine in China.

MOHR: Correct, guarding the Beijing-Tianjin railroad in the early 1920s. I think Mansfield was a bit disappointed initially that he didn't get the Beijing job, but after a while you could tell that he realized how important Japan was to the United States, and he grew to really love his job in Tokyo.

Q: Yeah well it was a far more important job at that particular time.

MOHR: Oh yes, and he understood that. He coined a memorable phrase, “The most important U.S. bilateral relationship—bar none.”

Q: Well you were the China watcher.

MOHR: Correct. I was the China watcher. There were approximately 12 people in the political section. 11 were fluent in Japanese, and then there was me.

Q: OK, so what did you feel like? You were in the Chrysanthemum club, the club for Japanese specialists, but you were a China hand. Did you feel like a fish out of water?

MOHR: Well, I wasn't in the Chrysanthemum club, composed of Japanese language officers. I was more like an observer. But I soon grew to be interested in Japan and Japanese society. So I asked my colleagues a lot of questions, and as is normal with human nature, when they realized I was interested in what they were doing, they grew to accept me as a sort of honorary member of the Chrysanthemum club. About halfway through the tour, the deputy chief of mission called me into his office and offered me the opportunity of Japanese language training. It was a great honor, but after thinking it over for several days, I declined. I thought that if I learned Japanese, when I was in China, I would feel guilty and anxious because I wasn't doing enough to keep up my Japanese, and when I was in Japan, I would be worrying about losing my Chinese language skills. So, I declined. Some foreign service officers have been able to do both, but I knew I was not one of them.

Q: What was your job at the Embassy?

MOHR: Well, my job was in the external section, to report on Japanese foreign policy in various areas, especially of course China. My other areas of responsibility included the Korean Peninsula, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations. I would go to the Gaimusho

(the Japanese foreign ministry) several times a week, and usually call on the deputy director of the relevant office, because the deputy director was my equal in rank at the time. The members of the Japanese foreign ministry all spoke good English, even those for whom English was their second foreign language.

Q: What was the Japanese attitude or approach to China during this time?

MOHR: A very good question. Their basic overall attitude was a bit critical. They felt we were too carried away with China, that we were too emotional. Of course one major concern was that our preoccupation with China would translate into ignoring Japanese interests.

Q: China does this. People are falling in love with China over and over again.

MOHR: Yes, the Chinese are very good at manipulation. One example was long-time conservative columnist Joe Alsop. He was a friend of Taiwan, and a critic of China, for many decades. Then, sometime in the 1970s I believe, China invited him for a visit and he went. His column afterwards was incredible. He basically said something like, after going to China, he understood that they were communist, but underneath it all, they were still Chinese! Since they were still Chinese, they were basically good. An incredible flip-flop. The Chinese are good at this, and the Japanese are not. The Japanese spend great sums of money on public relations, invite Congressmen and their staffs to Japan, and still most Americans have a warmer feeling towards China. The Chinese have this amazing ability to beguile foreigners that very few other foreign countries have. The Japanese are particularly bad at this, and so are the Koreans.

Q: The Koreans are in your face.

MOHR: Yes.

Q: Which I find a pleasant habit in a way. It depends on...

MOHR: Your mood and on the circumstances. Whereas the Chinese know how to make you feel welcome, and important. They are very good listeners, and rarely spend time trying to impress you. But if you are observant, you notice they rarely talk about themselves, and never gossip.

Q: The Chinese come across as being almost obsequious.

MOHR: Not quite. Underneath it all, the Chinese are not obsessed with wanting to be liked. They are very comfortable in their own skins. If they want something from you, they focus on their objective. They do not waste any time on trying to impress you, but on trying to influence you. But they do this is such a pleasant way, that you don't feel manipulated. I think most Americans want to be liked, and the Chinese can sense this and use it to their advantage.

Q: Did you find the ambassador and the staff called upon you to find out what is going on in China very much?

MOHR: Yes, Mansfield would, on occasion. But most of the time, he would simply read my reporting. As was well known, the Ambassador was a man of few words.

Q: He was known as probably the most laconic man who has ever been in the Senate.

MOHR: Yes, this reminds me of a good story. The first time I was invited to the residence for a social event, I noticed the Ambassador remained in the receiving area. All evening, Mansfield remained in the foyer. I was puzzled as to why he wasn't mixing, so I went up to him and asked if anything was wrong. I think this got him a bit irritated. He just replied that he was fine, and that I should go back and mix. I shouldn't have bothered him, and afterwards, I learned my lesson. The Ambassador didn't like small talk, and he didn't like to socialize. At receptions, he would stay in the foyer, and never mix. Another time, Ambassador Woodcock was in town from Beijing, and I was informed that Ambassador Mansfield wanted me to accompany him in taking Woodcock back to the airport. Now

Narita airport is a good two and a half hour ride from Tokyo. Woodcock also didn't talk much. I sat in the back between them, and I counted how many words they said to each other during that time: nine. The atmosphere however was pleasant. They were good friends. But neither talked much. I like to talk, so I went a little crazy, since I couldn't talk unless spoken to. And they did not feel the need to speak to me.

After saying goodbye at the airport to Woodcock, I did not look forward to the ride home. Finally, I asked the Ambassador if it would be all right to put on the radio and listen to the U.S. armed forces network. He agreed. It was the hour for the news. All of a sudden, there was a commentary tearing into Senators from the oil patch, claiming they were basically bought and did not represent the interests of the country, but only the interests of the oil industry. After the program was over, I asked the Ambassador if he would care to comment. He puffed once on his pipe, then said: “Yup. He's right.” I was so stunned, I was at a loss for words.

Another advantage of having Mansfield as your ambassador was that you had nothing to fear from visiting Congressional delegations. Usually, you don't know how critical they might be, including to the Ambassador. But with Mansfield there, all Congressmen, and especially Senators, were downright reverential. Usually, the Senators continued to address him as Mr. Leader.

Q: When did you leave?

MOHR: I left Tokyo in 1980. Having been overseas since 1971, it was time to go back to the United States. My family had doubled. I now had a daughter and a son. My daughter Jennifer was born on Taiwan in 1972, my son Adam was born in Hong Kong in 1975.

Q: What was happening in China in 1980?

MOHR: Well, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping had launched major economic reforms in 1979. Deng had a three-day trip to Japan just as I was leaving, so I was able to end my tour on a high note, doing an analysis of the state of Sino-Japanese relations.

Q: Where did you go to in 1980?

MOHR: It was time to go back to Washington. The best job I could nail down was the position of deputy director for the office of Pacific Island affairs in the East Asia and Pacific bureau (EAP) at State.

Q: But you hadn't served in China.

MOHR: True, but I had served in Hong Kong and Taiwan, had done political reporting on China from Hong Kong, and had reported on aspects of China's foreign relations from Japan. I needed to go back to Washington. My wife especially wanted to return. So I became a Pacific island expert. It was quite interesting. I even got calls from National Geographic. Richard Holbrooke was still assistant secretary for East Asian affairs, and for some reason, he was interested in the Pacific Islands, so I got to know him fairly well.

Q: What was your territory?

MOHR: The desk covered all the islands in the Pacific, such as Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga, and all the states of Micronesia.

Q: I spent one weekend in Micronesia.

MOHR: Micronesia was a U.S. trust, on behalf of the United Nations (UN). At the time, we were negotiating a new status with it, which was called free association. The negotiations were carried out by an office in the Department of the Interior, but State supervised them.

Q: It was a little bit like looking at the slums of a West Virginia small town.

MOHR: So I understand. We didn't do a very good job of nurturing an economy there. It must be noted that Congress played a role in all of this as well. By that I mean the Congressional chairman who had responsibility for Micronesia, Phil Burton, seemed to enjoy having the islanders dependent on his largesse.

Q: Well we were going through a policy I guess of strategic denial. That was keeping the Soviet fleet from establishing port visits and all that.

MOHR: In Micronesia?

Q: Yes, and all over.

MOHR: Yes, that is correct. In the end, we agreed on a status of free association, whereby they would be internally self-governing, and the U.S. was responsible for defense and security issues. We were also willing to train them in the area of foreign policy.

Q: I became part of that in that I spent a week out there talking about setting up a consular service.

MOHR: I maintain that the Chinese should study the model of Micronesia for Tibet. They should apply that to Tibet, that is let Tibet be responsible for its own internal affairs, its own domestic self-government, while China would be responsible for Tibet's defense and security. The Chinese always used to get irritated when I brought up the subject.

Q: Well did you get involved in any of these Micronesian status negotiations? Some of these small island states hired rather high-powered lobbyists in Washington.

MOHR: Well, I wasn't directly involved, as my duties were limited to the Pacific Island countries. But I would occasionally accompany our ambassador for these negotiations, Peter Rosenblatt, to the Hill for briefings on the status of the negotiations with members of Congress, and also attend policy and negotiating strategy meetings at State and

Interior. Speaking of high-powered lobbyists, I was always amazed that the USG gave the Micronesians enough money to hire lawyers for these negotiations from the top law firms in D.C., such as Covington and Burling, to argue against us.

Q: After you left that office, where did you go?

MOHR: There was a bit of drama, because after only one year, the front office in the EAP broke my assignment, and moved me to a similar position in the Office of Taiwan affairs. I was to be involved in significant and important work on the Taiwan desk.

Q: Now is a good time to stop. Let's pick it up next time from there.

MOHR: Great.

Q: Today is November 5, 2009, with Mark Mohr. Mark, you were last talking about what you were doing in 1981.

MOHR: Correct. After one year back in Washington, where I had been working in the Office of Pacific Island Affairs, I was then transferred in 1981 to the Office of Taiwan Affairs. Mike Armacost, who was then principal deputy assistant secretary in the bureau, told me we were about to enter into sensitive negotiations with the Chinese over U.S. arm sales to Taiwan, and the office director for Taiwan, Don Ferguson, needed a deputy who was politically sensitive and experienced both on Chinese and Taiwanese matters. The front office felt I was the best person for the job.

The background is as follows. In 1979, under the Carter administration, we established full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). We broke diplomatic relations with the Republic of China on Taiwan. We cancelled our defense treaty with Taiwan. To continue unofficial relations, the U.S. and Taiwan established liaison offices in Washington and Taipei, respectively, with no diplomatic status, but with a charter to carry out economic, commercial, cultural and other forms of non-governmental relations.

Our office was—and still is—called the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). Needless to say, the Taiwanese were a bit nervous about the new relationship, so to reassure them, we agreed to continue to supply them with arms, even though we had no defense treaty. Naturally, the PRC did not like us selling arms to Taiwan, after our having established full diplomatic relations with them, and having recognized that there was only one China and that Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait agreed there was only one China. This was the language of the normalization document between the U.S. and China. With regard to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, the PRC view was simple. As one PRC official told me, “Taiwan is part of China. We don't sell arms to Mississippi, so you shouldn't sell arms to Taiwan.”

In the fall of 1981, Chinese foreign minister Huang Hua visited Washington and told President Reagan that if we didn't conclude an agreement with them, a bilateral executive agreement to limit arms sales to Taiwan, they were going to downgrade diplomatic relations. Reagan, as I understand it, told Huang that he understood China's position, and suggested that China do what it had to do. He made no commitment. But when then Secretary of State Alexander Haig learned of the Chinese position, he advised the president that the U.S. should enter into such negotiations. To my amazement, the president agreed, and in the first year of the Reagan administration, the State Department led negotiations with the PRC to limit arms sales to Taiwan. It was in this environment that I was transferred to the Taiwan desk, to be the desk's representative, at the working level, for these negotiations.

I was against these negotiations for several reasons. In principle, I did not see the logic in negotiating with China over our actions toward Taiwan. Additionally, I thought having our relations downgraded, that is, China sending our ambassador home from Beijing while it withdrew its ambassador from Washington, was a small price to pay for continuing to sell arms to Taiwan. I also thought it was possible that Haig was misreading Reagan. I couldn't see how Reagan would ever agree to a date certain to end U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, which is what the Chinese asserted was their main goal for these negotiations.

So I was against the negotiations, but participated in the talks and argued my views. For the most part, during the negotiations, my arguments went unheeded, and the negotiations advanced.

Another reason I thought the negotiations were a bad idea was the existence of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, once it heard that the Carter Administration was going to normalize with Taiwan, passed the TRA in 1979, both to set up a legal framework for unofficial bilateral relations with Taiwan and also to provide Taiwan with a guarantee that the U.S. would support its defense. Among the TRA's provisions, accordingly, was one asserting that it was the responsibility of the U.S. to provide Taiwan what it needed for its self-defense. The definition of what Taiwan needed was to be left up to the U.S., but nonetheless there was now a law stating the U.S. had certain obligations to provide Taiwan with weapons, with military equipment. However, Alexander Haig wanted to negotiate with the Chinese to limit, and perhaps terminate this obligation. I really thought we were entering into dangerous territory, and felt it would be best not to do so. In my opinion, Haig was a bit panicked over the prospect of having relations with China downgraded on his watch. In any case, he favored the negotiations, and we plunged ahead. The main working level person who moved the negotiations forward was Bill Rope, then director of the office of Chinese affairs at State.

Q: I am not sure I know him.

MOHR: I had lots of arguments with Bill, but we got along. He naturally thought my views were misguided. He would lecture me about the strategic picture, and how I was failing to grasp it. He really wanted a security relationship with China, felt Taiwan was an obstacle toward this goal, and believed with the Taiwan issue gone as an irritant in the U.S.-China relationship, China would grow to be a reliable strategic partner, thereby greatly shifting the strategic balance against the Soviet Union. I argued that China had no interest in being a strategic partner of the United States (it still doesn't), and in any case, neither the president nor the Senate would allow us to do anything that was seriously inimical to

Taiwan's defense interests. Bill was supported in Beijing by Chas Freeman, who had been office director for China during normalization, and was now our deputy chief of mission (DCM) in Beijing.

Q: I have interviewed Chas.

MOHR: Yes, Bill and Chas were the main forces leading the negotiations from the U.S. side, but it is important to remember that they were at all times carrying out the wishes of the secretary of state. Another unusual thing about these negotiations was that there were no checks and balances within the USG. It was a totally State-run policy and negotiation. Jim Lilly, who was a China expert, had been at the National Security Council (NSC) supervising China and Taiwan policy for the White House when he was appointed head of AIT in Taipei. The White House, in its wisdom, felt there was no need to replace Lilly at the NSC anytime soon, despite the fact that we were entering into negotiations with China over limiting arms sales to Taiwan. So throughout the negotiations, which lasted almost a year, there was no NSC person for China to advise the president. Haig also did a pretty good job of keeping the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) out of the negotiations. So the China desk at State, in the person of its director, Bill Rope, and sometimes the deputy director, Scott Hallford, essentially did all the work in moving the negotiations forward. Bill kept his bosses informed, but John Holdridge, the assistant secretary of state for East Asia, also fully supported the wisdom of the negotiations and trusted Bill to execute the policy.

Since I wasn't key to the negotiations, I knew very little at the time they were going on regarding the details, although I was aware of the general trend. However, by the time the agreement was concluded on August 17, 1982, George Shultz had already replaced Alexander Haig as secretary of state. During that summer, Paul Wolfowitz had replaced John Holdridge as assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs. Wolfowitz was much more conservative than Holdridge, who was a foreign service officer and had been an assistant to Kissinger at the NSC when relations with China had first been established.

Wolfowitz was much more skeptical toward China, and much more positive toward Taiwan. In any event, Wolfowitz called me into his office in the spring of 1983, as my tour on the Taiwan desk was winding down, and said he wanted me, and not Bill Rope, to write him a memo detailing the history of the negotiations leading to the agreement concluded in August 1982. This is how I learned a lot of the behind-the-scenes events during the negotiations. I had access to all the secretary to the president (Sec-Pres) memos that Haig had sent detailing our strategy for the negotiations, his suggestions for how to overcome problems raised by the Chinese, etc. If these memos ever become public, they would be a good read. They are fascinating. In my opinion, they indicate that Haig essentially agreed with the Chinese on the need to terminate arms sales to Taiwan, and felt he could win the president over to his views. It is my contention that one of the reasons, perhaps the main reason, for Haig's dismissal in 1983 was that Reagan came to realize that Haig was absolutely serious in his resolve to terminate U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, and this was not what Reagan wanted.

Following the signing of the joint communiqu# in August 1982, the Taiwanese, understandably upset, sent a secret arms buying mission to the U.S. to test Reagan's reassurances to President Chiang Ching-kuo of Taiwan that the communiqu# would not harm Taiwan's security interests. We at State were told by the NSC, just weeks after the signing of the communiqu# with China, that a secret arms buying mission was coming from Taiwan, and that if we wanted to deny the Taiwanese any item from their wish list, the president himself wanted to be informed in detail as to the reasons for the denial. In other words, the White House was telling us, despite the communiqu#, to give Taiwan as much in the way of armaments as possible. It seemed to me that not only did we have a two-China policy, but that the policy was determined by which China could complain the loudest.

It took about a year for the arms package to be announced for Taiwan. In the meanwhile, in January 1983, there occurred another remarkable event. A conservative magazine, Human Events, published an interview with President Reagan. The interviewer began

by asserting that many of the president's supporters were greatly disturbed by the joint communiqu#, believing it had brought great harm to Taiwan. As I recall what was in the magazine, it ran something like this: “Your base is terribly upset. They think you sold out Taiwan. They think you are going to stop arms sales to Taiwan.” To this, Reagan replied, (I am essentially paraphrasing here) “No, not at all. If you read the communiqu# carefully, all it says is that as tensions are reduced between the two sides, Taiwan's need for arms will accordingly be reduced, so at that time, we will reduce our arms sales to Taiwan. It does not say we will willy-nilly reduce arms sales to Taiwan. The U.S. position remains unchanged with regard to the resolution of the differences between China and Taiwan. They can adopt whatever means they feel necessary, so long as it does not include the use of force.”

One of the reasons I was shocked by what Reagan had said in Human Events magazine was that we were in fact meeting in then deputy secretary of state Larry Eagleburger's office every Saturday following the signing of the communiqu# to plan out what our yearly reduction of arms sales to Taiwan should be. In other words, we were “willy-nilly” meeting to decide how to reduce arms sales to Taiwan on a yearly basis, to show the Chinese we were carrying out the communiqu#. Following the publication of the Human Events article, I raised the issue with deputy secretary Eagleburger. He assured me that the secretary of state (Schultz) and the president were exactly as one on this issue, and our meetings would continue. When I noted this was exactly what he said about the previous secretary (Haig), and that person had been dismissed, Eagleburger snapped that nobody likes a “wise-ass,” and if I was not on board with the program, I could easily be terminated from these meetings. At this point, I decided it was best to keep my mouth shut. The meetings went on, and finally there was agreement to slowly limit arms sales to Taiwan on a yearly basis. Arms sales figures are public, so this would indicate to the Chinese that we were carrying out our commitments under the communiqu#.

One of the reasons I found these negotiations fascinating is that they revealed a major error in judgment on the part of the Chinese. Traditionally, one of the criticisms of

American foreign policy is that American practitioners are not good listeners. We hear only what we want to hear. It is also said that the Chinese are excellent listeners. Well, in the case of the negotiation and aftermath of the communiqu#, when the Chinese realized that U.S. arms sales to Taiwan were not decreasing by any significant amount, and would never in anybody's lifetime go down to zero, they felt that they had been outsmarted by the U.S. I heard this several times during my tour in Beijing from 1988-1990, again from a senior Chinese official when I was in Brisbane in 1993, and again from a senior Chinese friendship association official in 1997. To all of them, I had the same reply: during all the months of the negotiations on the joint communiqu#, you could have easily sent your ambassador in to see President Reagan, or you could have sent your foreign minister to see President Reagan. But you didn't. You chose to believe the words of the secretary of state, Alexander Haig, because you liked what Haig was saying. It agreed with what you thought. This despite the well-know fact that the president is senior to the secretary state, and in this case the president was a conservative Republican with a documented fondness for Taiwan. So, I told the Chinese that actually they had outsmarted themselves, and they had only themselves to blame when the results of the communiqu# were not as they had wished them.

Q: Did you get involved with the Chinese PRC people at all?

MOHR: No. I was on the Taiwan desk, and my job was to listen sympathetically to the representatives from Taiwan in Washington when they asked about the status of the negotiations, and then tell them nothing.

Q: Well did you find they had pretty good intelligence on what was going on?

MOHR: The Chinese?

Q: No, the Taiwanese.

MOHR: No, not on this, because on this, as I said, even most of the rest of the U.S. government did not know what was going on, so there were no leaks. Jim Lilly, formerly of the NSC and then the head of AIT in Taipei, was also kept out of the loop. He was very frustrated. So the Taiwanese did not know what was going on, and they were very anxious.

Q: Well was the political consideration that you had with the F-16 being produced in Texas, which was George Bush's...

MOHR: That was later, in the early 1990s, at the end of President Bush's term. At the time when Reagan became president, in 1981, Taiwan wanted the latest advanced fighter, know as the FX. Perhaps this is what agitated the PRC in the first place to demand a communiqu#. In any event, the then head of the NSC, Richard Allen, wanted to sell Taiwan the FX, but Secretary Haig argued against the sale, and won the argument. By then, we had begun negotiations on the communiqu#, and Haig convinced Reagan that while the negotiations were going on, it would be a bad idea to give Taiwan a new fighter jet.

So when George Bush became president, and he sold the F-16 to Taiwan, the Chinese said, “Ten years ago we signed a communiqu# saying you would limit arms sales to Taiwan, and also limit the quality and quantity of such sales. Now you are selling them your most advanced jet fighter. What is going on?” Some at State somewhat facetiously replied to the Chinese that an election was coming up, the fighter was made in Texas, and Bush needed that state's electoral votes. Thus, this was a purely internal U.S. affair, and as such, the Chinese had no right to complain. The Chinese did not think this “joke” very funny. I actually thought it was, because whenever you raised certain issues with the Chinese, such as human rights, they would respond that it was an internal affair, and the U.S. had no right to interfere in their internal affairs. But I could see where the Chinese would not appreciate the humor regarding a U.S. jet fighter sale to Taiwan.

Q: Anybody who knows the Taiwan issue knows it is a hot potato. The foreign service knows because we had our noses smashed in; the China hands especially suffered. Haig was a Europeanist, a NATO hand. Perhaps he saw the issue from a different perspective, and miscalculated.

MOHR: I agree that he miscalculated, definitely on how far he could bring along the president, but also in his analysis of China's leaders and their motives. In my opinion, Deng Xiaoping was under attack from his left. They were charging that he had engineered the normalization of relations with the United States, but Reagan was now president, and China was not getting anything from the U.S. I believe Deng cooked up this communiqu# idea to look tough to his opposition. I also believe—and this is just speculation— that Deng was as surprised as anyone else when the U.S. agreed to negotiate. Remember, China was only threatening to downgrade relations if we refused to negotiate. It was not threatening to break relations. I hope that someday the Chinese government internal documents will be opened to the public, so we can get a better idea of what Deng was actually thinking. I really don't think they would have broken relations with us had we refused to negotiate. After all, at the time, they needed us far more than we needed them. They were very poor. They needed a big country to buy from them and jump-start their economy.

Q: Well after you finished this communiqu# business what were you doing?

MOHR: The communiqu# was finished in the summer of 1982, and it took about a year to decide what kind of big arms package we would sell to Taiwan without causing a major rift with the PRC. Somehow, we accomplished all this, and by the summer of 1983 I was due for another transfer.

I applied for a one-year Congressional fellowship, and was accepted to work in the office of Senator John Glenn. At the time, he was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee for East Asia. It was an interesting year. Glenn was a very good man, but

he was not your “average” politician. Essentially, he got elected because he was a hero, and would never have any trouble getting reelected from Ohio. He ran for president the year I was in his office, and received only about five percent of the primary vote. This is because he always told the truth as he saw it. He studied an issue very carefully, gave it considerable thought, and then came to a conclusion He never factored in the political consequences. For example, he decided we were too much in debt, so there was a need to raise taxes. Therefore, he campaigned by telling the voters that if he were elected, he would raise their taxes. So, as I said, he received only five percent of the primary vote. It is a little sad to realize that if a politician campaigns on a platform of telling people what needs to be done, rather than what they want to hear, that person can never get elected.

Another thing I learned while working on the Hill is that there is a different culture in Congress. If you're there, you realize that members actually think, since they make the laws, that they are above the law. This is of course never stated. But to prove my point, just take a look at every labor law passed by Congress. There is always a stipulation that the requirements do not apply to them, at least that was the case up until the early 1980s, when I worked there. There was no such thing as fair labor laws as applied to people who work for the members of Congress. They could be fired on the day, on a whim, without regard to cause or due process. During my stay there, one Republican staffer was fired because the Congressman he worked for learned he was dating a Democratic staffer.

Another example is that, according to the law, staffers cannot work on political campaigns during normal working hours because they are federal government employees. Those who work on the campaigns are supposed be separate staff, who get paid from campaign funds. If a Congressional staffer wants to work on a campaign, he or she has to do so after work, as a volunteer. But in fact, all staffers, in the Senate and the House, work on political campaigns, and do so during regular working hours. This is illegal, but everyone does it. Since everyone does it, no one points a finger at anyone else.

After my one-year fellowship, I returned to the Department in the position of deputy director in the East Asian Bureau's office of regional affairs. This was the office that handled issues that cut across more than one country, such as refugee issues. And that is what I worked on: the boat people, the Asian refugee issues. I took a familiarization trip to Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines to visit refugee camps. It was really sad, and moving. So I did what I could to help. It was the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

Q: Were we moving at all at that time towards the orderly departure program?

MOHR: I really don't recall the details.

Q: Well the orderly departure program was an attempt to get the Vietnamese government to agree to let these people go in an orderly fashion, so that they just wouldn't flee and perhaps drown.

MOHR: I really don't recall. I think this was before the orderly departure program. My job was to find countries to take the refugees who were in the camps.

Q: There was a lot of concern about the Thais and all, as they were getting people from Cambodia.

MOHR: The only recollection I have for that period was that, on my familiarization trip, I went to Thailand and took a trip to the border. It was unmarked. Just miles of road, and the Thais said, “On the other side of the road is Cambodia.” I replied, “Oh, Ok, if you say so.” Then we heard some gunshots on the Cambodian side and departed in haste.

Q: Well we are talking about 1983, what did you do then?

MOHR: I worked in the office of regional affairs. Aside from refugee work, I also coordinated policy papers, with input from the various desks. I don't think the work was

very challenging, because I don't remember much from that time. I think my biggest goal was to get out of that office as soon as possible.

Q: So what happened?

MOHR: I actually managed to cut my tour of duty short and get out after one year. I got lucky. The State Department had training fellowships, usually for one year, and they usually went to people in the geographic bureaus. Now the political-military bureau (PM) argued that they should be allotted some training slots, to train people in political-military affairs. The Department of Personnel finally agreed, but when the decision was made, it was well into the spring of 1984, and most people had already received their assignments, so personnel told PM that if they could find people willing to take the fellowships, those people could break their current assignments. I had a friend in PM, and he told me about the fellowships. It was perfect. I broke my assignment in regional affairs and went to the University of Maryland (I didn't want to leave my family) to study arms control. I already had an ongoing assignment once I finished studying: to be the action officer for the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) negotiations. I enjoyed my studies at the University of Maryland immensely. In addition to a course on the history of nuclear weapons negotiations, I took a course on the history of the Soviet Union. I also helped teach a course on U.S.-alliance relations. While the professor handled NATO, I discussed U.S. relations with Japan and Korea. After finishing my studies in mid-1985, I began my job as the INF officer in PM.

Q: What is INF?

MOHR: Intermediate nuclear forces. These are missiles that can carry nuclear warheads and travel from 500 to 5500 kilometers. Basically, those were our missiles in western Europe that could hit the Soviet Union, and comparable Soviet missiles that could hit western European capitals. Our basing countries were the United Kingdom, Italy, West Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. We had two kinds of INF missiles: the Pershing

IIs, which were ballistic missiles, and ground-launched cruise missiles, or GLCMs, which were much slower. The Soviets had only one missile, the SS-20, but it was a ballistic missile, and they had about 2000 of them. We had about 500 INF missiles. So we were outgunned, so to speak.

Q: It seemed to be a ploy on the part of the Soviets, perhaps their last major ploy in an attempt to break up NATO.

MOHR: Well, there was a lot of opposition in the basing countries among the people, who believed that if U.S. INF missiles were installed in their countries, that would only increase the likelihood of their being targeted by Soviet missiles. Of course, they already were targeted by Soviet nuclear missiles. But in any case, there were lots of protests. The Soviets at the time did not have such problems as a protesting public, but they had other problems. They produced so many SS-20s that they also had enough to target U.S. bases in Japan and South Korea, which did not endear them to those countries, and given the Sino-Soviet split, they pointed a few SS-20s at the Chinese. The Soviets thought this was no big deal, just an upgrade of previous nuclear missiles aimed at China. However, because the SS-20s were much more powerful, their deployment really upset the countries of northeast Asia, so the net result was that the deployment of these new missiles made Soviet relations in Asia worse, not better.

Q: So the INF negotiations concerned U.S. missiles in Europe that could hit the Soviet Union, and Soviet missiles that could hit Europe. It did not involve strategic missiles, those Soviet missiles that could hit the United States.

MOHR: That's correct. I think most people involved in the negotiations in the USG believed that if we could eliminate both sides' INF missiles, this would be a great victory for us, since the Soviets had 2000 and we had only 500. Just as important, it would be the first nuclear arms negotiation between the two sides to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons. Previous nuclear arms negotiations had put a ceiling on a particular kind of

nuclear weapon, but those weapons remained in existence. This negotiation, if successful, would really be a historic first.

As background, the major players from the U.S. side were the Department of State; two players from the Department of Defense, representatives from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS—the uniformed military), and representatives from the office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD—the civilians); the CIA; and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). These five agencies had to clear on all position papers. If there was disagreement between the agencies, a Sec-Pres (secretary of state to the president) memo had to be produced. The memo would spell out the positions of each side, and then the NSC, acting on behalf of the president, would make its decision so the negotiations could move forward. I was in charge of drafting the Sec-Pres memos. Each agency's viewpoint had to be accurately reflected, and of course, each agency had to clear on the memo.

The big obstacle throughout the many years of the INF negotiation was that although four agencies (State, JCS, CIA and ACDA) were almost always in agreement, OSD was almost always opposed to anything that would move the negotiations along. OSD almost always won in the final NSC decision following submission of a Sec-Pres memo, which was the reason these negotiations had been dragging on for years. I don't know for sure why the OSD position usually prevailed against all the other government agencies, including the uniformed military (the JCS), but it was probably because the President favored the OSD position at the time and didn't really want to make progress on the treaty.

In the course of my work, I developed a friendship with someone from OSD and he explained to me the basic thinking of Richard Pearle, assistant secretary of defense for the bureau that handled the INF negotiations, and Frank Gaffney, his principal deputy.As Pearle and Gaffney analyzed the situation, according to this official, the Soviet Union would always win out against the U.S. in a true negotiation. This was because the U.S. was saddled with Congress and the media, who were always pushing for compromise.

Since the Soviet Union did not have to answer to its legislature or its press, it could hold to its positions. The U.S. would be pressured to compromise, the Soviet Union wouldn't, so in the end, the Soviets would “win” under such circumstances. To counter this, Pearle and Gaffney felt the key was to be in negotiations with the Soviets, but never get any results. The reason to be in the INF negotiations was to appease our European allies. If we refused to be in negotiations, they would be upset and create all sorts of problems with the nuclear missiles we had based in their countries, even to the point someday of unilaterally insisting they be removed. So, according to this viewpoint, we definitely should be constantly negotiating with the Soviets over the INF missiles, but we should throw up so many obstacles that there would never be any chance of ever getting an agreement. I know this sounds bizarre, but I believe that once the record of the negotiations becomes public, it will easily be seen—up until the final year of the negotiations, when the U.S. became far more flexible for reasons I will explain later—that the Soviet negotiating stance was more reasonable by far than ours.

What finally broke the stalemate in the negotiations (and my source here was the NSC official in charge of the INF negotiations) was a decision by Nancy Reagan. She wanted a victory for the president in the last year of his second term, and decided that an INF treaty was achievable. Actually, I think the country owes Mrs. Reagan a great deal of gratitude for her decision. In any case, she spoke to the president and he decided to break the deadlock. I was asked by the chief advisor to the Secretary of State for arms control, Jim Timbie, if we were in a position to get a treaty. I answered in the negative, explaining that previous Sec-Pres decisions by the NSC had pretty much ruled out the possibility of securing a treaty. He told me if I knew what a “reclama” was. I said I did not.

He explained it was sending a decision memo over to the NSC for reconsideration of a previous decision. So I began sending reclama memos to the White House to reconsider previous decisions. It was the usual format: State, JCS, CIA and ACDA favor position A, OSD favors position B. Previous decision memos returned from the NSC had always come down in favor of position B. The first time I sent a reclama memo, it came down in

favor of position A. To say I was overjoyed would be an understatement. I now believed a treaty was obtainable. I sent out a slew of memos, and most of the decisions, the really important ones, came back reversing previous decisions and allowing the negotiations to move forward in earnest. Pearle and Gaffney were so upset by this turn of events, which occurred I believe toward the end of 1986, that they resigned their positions in government.

A treaty was finally concluded with the Soviets in time to be signed by the president and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Christmas 1987. For about a year leading up to the signing, I never worked so hard in my life. Instead of working by myself, I was actually given a staff of two people. Before this time, we would have interagency meetings to plan negotiating strategy about once a month. Now, we had such meetings daily. I had to draft the memos for the meetings, attend and take notes, then communicate the decisions to the delegation, then convey their thoughts back to the interagency meeting, etc. I awoke every morning around 6am, was in the office by about 7, and went home towards midnight. State paid for a taxi to take me home. (I must have been really important.) This was the schedule during the week. On weekends, we worked Saturdays from about9 a.m.- 4 p.m., and Sundays for a few hours. (On weekends, I drove to work; I had my own parking pass.) It was really grueling, but very exciting, because we all knew that we were making history.

The last two weeks before Christmas were particularly interesting. I received a call to come over to the White House, where the senior NSC official asked me how many key issues were still unresolved. I replied that there were about half a dozen, and given the cumbersome nature of the interagency clearing process, I doubted whether we could reach our self-imposed Christmas deadline. He told me simply to put all the outstanding remaining issues in a memo from him directly to the president, and the president would make the necessary decisions. He commented pointedly that we would be bypassing the Department of Defense. He said afterward I could send an “official” Sec-Pres memo, but

that would simply be for the bureaucratic record. I was stunned that he was telling me to do this outside the bureaucracy, but also extremely excited.

So I did as instructed, and it worked exactly as he said it would. The memo went to the president, and he approved all my recommended options. The last roadblocks were cleared, and we would have a treaty. Gorbachev came in December and signed the treaty with Reagan. Of course, much of the elation lessened when the realization hit that we still had to work hard to get the treaty ratified by the Senate. That took an additional six months. Jesse Helms was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he was of course opposed to the treaty. He tried to create many obstacles, even down to little things such as sending in an endless stream of questions to the Department, each of which had to be answered within days. Despite all his efforts, we secured 93 votes in favor of treaty ratification. We had actually accomplished something historic. As I noted previously, the INF treaty was the first arms control treaty between the U.S. and the Soviet Union which eliminated, rather than capped, an entire class of nuclear weapons.

Q: So this is all completed. In what odor were you with the rest of the Department? Did they feel you had gotten out of line and all?

MOHR: No, we were all praised. The paper trail was sorted out, there was great acclaim in the media, and on Capitol Hill. All those who worked on the treaty received step increases and salary bonuses. A few months later, all those in the interagency who worked on the treaty got to meet President Reagan. There were about 30 of us in the room with him. He gave a short speech thanking all of us for our work, and then we all had our pictures taken individually with him shaking our hands.

Q: So then what did you do?

MOHR: By the time the INF treaty was ratified, it was the summer of 1988, and I really wanted to go back to doing something involving China. I was fortunate. I secured the job as deputy director of the political section in Embassy Beijing. The only drawback was that,

at the time, there was no English language school in Beijing. State would have paid for my children to go to an international school in Japan, but my wife and I decided it would be least complicated if they all remained in the U.S. and I went to Beijing by myself.

Q: So you went out to Beijing when?

MOHR: In August of 1988. I remembered that the night before I was to leave, the basement of our house flooded, so we were up most of the night mopping up.

Q: You were in Beijing from when to when?

MOHR: From the summer of 1988 to the summer of 1990. In those days, Beijing was a two-year tour, because there were none of the amenities that there are today, such as the world's largest McDonalds.

Q: So you were there during 1989.

MOHR: Oh yes, I was an eyewitness to the entire Tiananmen Incident.

Q: When you got out there who was the ambassador?

MOHR: During my first year, Winston Lord was the ambassador. His tour, of over five years, ended in the spring of 1989, just as the events were taking place which would lead up to the Tiananmen Incident of June 4, 1989.

Q: I have interviewed Winston Lord.

MOHR: That should have been interesting. I think it would be good to stop here, and continue next time. Is that all right?

Q: Absolutely. So we will pick this up in 1988 when you are off to Beijing.

MOHR: Excellent.

Q: Today is December 3, 2009, with Mark Mohr. Mark we were going to pick this up as you were arriving in Beijing.

MOHR: Yes, without my family, to take up my new job as deputy director of the political section in Embassy Beijing.

Q: How long were you there?

MOHR: Two years. I arrived the summer of 1988. I had just arrived when we were hit by a veritable blizzard of senior level visits. As I recall, there were four Secretary-level visits in six weeks. I was responsible for coordinating all the meetings and the reporting.

Q: Let's talk a bit about in 1988. How were relations with China?

MOHR: They were getting better. With regard to living in China and being able to do our work, things were improving markedly. For the first time the Chinese were agreeing to accept invitations for lunch or dinner at our homes. So we could actually talk to them in social settings, ask questions, and get some answers. Things were warming up. So under Ambassador Winston Lord, things were getting better. We had the usual trade, non-proliferation, and human rights problems, but they were being managed. There was just less tension. There was a feeling that we were just beginning to get somewhere, that we were on the verge of a real breakthrough in relations. Then President Bush came to China in February 1989, and things took a turn for the worse.

The visit had been going well until the February “return” dinner in Beijing, which is the one given by the U.S. side following the dinner by the Chinese side. One of the guests the President had invited was Fang Lizhi, an astrophysicist who had been critical of the regime. The year before, in an interview in Hong Kong, Fang attacked the Chinese leadership for nepotism, singling out the special positions of the children of key leaders. Nevertheless, despite such criticism, Fang had been allowed to keep his job and to talk to foreign journalists. So we invited him to the Bush dinner, as a symbol of a regime

critic. But apparently Fang was particularly disliked by Deng Xiaoping, and Deng ordered that Fang physically be prevented from attending the dinner. Fang was blocked by Chinese police about a block from the hotel where the banquet was taking place. It was a strange situation, and the embassy and the White House drew much subsequent criticism for inviting Fang. Yet, as I stated above, he clearly was not one of the most punished regime critics. The only sanction against him was he was not allowed to attend physics conferences overseas. Within China, he was not being punished. If Deng disliked him so much, why weren't there more sanctions against him? And why did the regime wait until the last minute, until Fang was about a block from the banquet hotel, to deny him entrance? These are questions still to be answered.

Q: In the Soviet Union, in totalitarian regimes, you get this sometimes when relations are getting better, you have essentially the security forces on their own going out to screw things up. I mean this happens again and again. This is power within power. I was just wondering was this a possibility?

MOHR: That is a very good point. Well certainly it is a possibility. The situation certainly was a mess, because the Chinese deliberately embarrassed the president of the United States. More importantly, it revealed to us in the Embassy that “something was rotten in Denmark.” It indicated a kind of weakness in the leadership, perhaps controversy over the state of the U.S.-China relationship amongst elements in the Chinese government, to which you just alluded. We in the political section, with the support of the ambassador, decided to fan out and press all our contacts in Beijing about the sensitive topic of what was going on within the Chinese leadership. To beef up our analytical efforts, we also recruited a Chinese political expert from within the USG in Washington. Our deputy chief of mission, Peter Thomson, didn't think the Fang incident was all that big a deal. Embassy political counselor Ray Burghardt, economic counselor Jim Larocco and I disagreed with Peter. We had many lively debates. We gleaned over the next few months from our Chinese contacts that something was indeed wrong, but frustratingly, no one would offer any specifics. Then, on April 15, 1989, former Chinese party chief Hu Yaobang died, the

students started protesting, and events were put in train that eventually led to the shooting of the students on June 4.

Q: Had you learned any details of the problems within the political leadership?

MOHR: There was a split in the leadership. A few years before, Deng Xiaoping had purged Hu Yaobang as head of the Chinese Communist Party. Zhao Ziyang moved from premier to party chief, and Li Peng took over as premier. Hu had favored an opening up of Chinese society, and was particularly beloved in academic circles and by the students. Deng put a lid on Hu's attempted reforms, and Li Peng kept the lid on. So Li was not popular. When Hu died in April, the students began expressing their aggravation that a good man had died, while in their opinion a bad man (Li Peng) still lived. They expressed their protest in rallies and in posters in the days following Hu's death. Of course, this was incendiary stuff. The students all camped out in Tiananmen Square. They took over the running of downtown Beijing. Finally on May 20, the regime declared martial law in the area around Tiananmen Square . Troops were brought in. And sometime after midnight, June 4, they fired on the students, killing many. The shooting, courtesy of international television, whose personnel had been brought in to cover the visit of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to Beijing May 15-18, was broadcast around the world. The reason that the situation had gotten to the point of violence, again, was that the party was split on how to deal with the students. Party chief Zhao Ziyang, who was politically a moderate and in favor of many of the positions that Hu Yaobang had taken, wanted a dialogue with the students. Premier Li Peng wanted to deal with the students harshly, taking a typically old-line communist party position. Li had the support of Deng Xiaoping, so eventually Zhao was marginalized and the troops were given the order to use lethal force.

Q: It really seemed incredible.

MOHR: Yes, I was an eyewitness to the events of June 4 around Tiananmen Square, although from the vantage point of a hotel room located on the 15th floor of the Beijing

Hotel. How did I get to the 15th floor of this hotel? Let me explain. Once martial law had been declared in May, it was very difficult to report from the square. Cell phones hadn't been invented yet, so you had to go to the nearest public phone, located in the lobby of the Beijing Hotel, and call in whatever you had to report from there. But there were only a limited number of public phones at the hotel, and all the reporters wanted access to them as well, so you had to wait your turn on line. Then I suggested to the ambassador that we rent out a room in the Beijing Hotel, so embassy officers could go to the room and use the phone there. They could also shower, or take a nap. The ambassador approved. The room, as I noted above, was on the 15th floor, and had a view of the main avenue, Chang'an Jie. It did not look onto the square, but from the room, you could see the entrance to the square.

On the day of June 3, I was one of the members from the Embassy assigned to report on events from Tiananmen Square. I arrived during the day, and was still there towards midnight. Sometime after 11 p.m., we could hear gunfire coming from the westerly direction off the square. A few minutes later, a group of students came to us and said that army troops were moving toward the square, and it would be best for our safety if we left. We agreed, and departed the square. As we were crossing Chang An Jie to get to the Beijing Hotel, an amazing thing happened. Now you have to picture the scene. Tanks were moving towards us from our left. Although they were still a few hundred yards away, we were trying to get across the street as soon as we could. Suddenly, a man on a bicycle swerved and cut us off. He stopped his bike, looked at us, and asked, “Change money?” He was actually a black-market money changer, and despite all that was going on around us, wanted to know if we were interested in changing dollars into Chinese currency. In retrospect, it was clearly a sign that the Chinese entrepreneurial spirit was alive and well. At the time, however, we just wanted to get across the street to the safety of the hotel, so we declined his offer and moved on.

Once we got to the room, as I mentioned above, you could not see what was going on in the square itself, but you could see the troops and tanks coming down the street, and

then turning into the square. This was nighttime, so visibility was not optimum. But you could clearly hear the tanks moving and the gunshots. One particularly heartbreaking thing was that I could make out a long phalanx of bicycles, the main means of transport for the Chinese people at the time, moving in the opposite direction, that is to say away, fleeing away from the main tank column. This was of course quite logical. However, one thin line of bicycles was moving in the opposite direction, directly toward the advancing tank column. I assumed these were people who had simply snapped. They were so angry at army troops firing live ammunition at citizens that they just decided to drive their bikes into the tanks. It was suicidal, and all I could do was watch. Again, visibility was poor, but I could make out the gunshots and the sounds of bikes tumbling over. I was deeply moved and very upset, but there was nothing I could do except mumble silent prayers that the “bike column” turn itself around, and move away from the troops. After a certain amount of time I just couldn't watch anymore. There were other embassy people in the room, and I was exhausted, both emotionally and physically, so I went home.

Q: Well, you knew something had to happen.

MOHR: Actually most observers, including myself (but not Ambassador Lilly), predicted that the Chinese military would never use lethal force against unarmed students. Lilly had grown up in China. He father was an oil executive, so he had a better “gut” feel for Chinese actions. He predicted the June 4 massacre. The rest of us saw the events unfolding, but we rationalized the situation. I had one luncheon conversation with the Polish deputy chief of mission, whose last name was Goralczyk. He was regarded as the most astute observer of the Chinese political regime among the east Europeans. Goralczyk had studied at Beijing University in the 1950s, had married a Chinese woman, spoke Chinese fluently, and had spent about two decades in China.

He began the luncheon by lecturing me (in a friendly manner), explaining the difference in a communist state between the army and the police. The army, he said, fights foreigners. That is to say, the Chinese army is geared to fight the external threat, which at that

time was the Soviet Union. It is the job of the police, Goralczyk maintained, to deal with dissidents and protests. Goralczyk concluded that I could inform Washington that the Chinese police would clear the students out of Tiananmen Square. I didn't have to worry about the Chinese army, he said, because they would never fire on the students.

So I reported this conversation. I thought I had done a brilliant job, and I noted in my report that all the foreign contacts I had spoken to agreed with Goralczyk. I sided with Goralczyk, and predicted to Washington that the Chinese would not use guns against the students. Events were to prove both Goralczyk and I spectacularly wrong. As I said, the ambassador wrote his own cable, and his prediction turned out to be the correct one. I recall the conversation I had with the ambassador after he read my Goralczyk cable. He said, “What is this?” I replied , “It's what Goralczyk said.” He went on, “Do you believe him?” I said, “I want to believe him.” He said, “That is the trouble with you people. You want to believe. But that's not good enough. They (the Chinese army) are going to shoot them (the students).”

Q: So let's talk about how this was developing. Were you and your officers in the political section of the embassy able to go out and talk to students?

MOHR: Oh yes. I was in charge of the duty list. We had at least two officers per shift, from throughout the embassy, on duty at Tiananmen Square. There were three eight-hour shifts per day, so we had 24-hour coverage. We instituted the duty roster at the start of martial law, in May. I personally pulled many shifts, and overall must have spoken to hundreds of students. Their spirit was very inspiring. When they found out I was from the Embassy, they often asked me to autograph their shirtsleeve. They all approved that the Embassy had given political asylum to Fang Lizhi.

Q: Was this sort of Tiananmen business as it was developing as amorphous as it seems, just happening as a conjunction of forces?

MOHR: Well, the students were fairly organized, but no one knew where events would lead, so those events did have an amorphous quality to them. One of the fundamental mistakes the students made was that they didn't tap into popular support, especially from the workers. Chinese society has deep class division between educated and uneducated people. The students had a traditionally negative view of the workers, so they did not think it necessary to bring them on board. Had they done so, in my opinion, they might have succeeded in toppling Li Peng. However these were college students, so it is not surprising that they were not terribly politically astute. Also, the main student leaders on the square began to take on characteristics of the Chinese leadership. They were always at meetings, and if you asked to see one, the reply would be, “The meeting place is secret.” (All students at the time lived and met on Tiananmen Square, so they couldn't have been too far away.)

Q: Did you feel the students had a real goal?

MOHR: Well, they said they wanted more freedom, a more open society, and they wanted to put an end to political corruption. These were all noble goals, and the students were predictably idealistic and na#ve. It was a mistake, in my opinion, to declare one of their goals as democracy, and buttress this with the erection of a statue which they named the “Goddess of Democracy.” While the statue was wildly popular with the western media, the statue and the advocacy for democracy only made the leaders more paranoid and certain that the United States was behind the movement. In any case, I believe that if Zhao Ziyang had won the policy debate, he could have diffused the student protest. But he lost the debate—and his position—and was placed under house arrest, where he remained until his death.

Q: When this movement started, how were you in the political section seeing it before it really gained momentum? Were you seeing it as this is another little episode that would be blown away?

MOHR: We knew something was wrong at the time of President Bush's visit in February 1989, because they acted so awkwardly to prevent Fang Lizhi from attending the banquet. The trigger for the student movement was the death of Hu Yaobang on April 15, and you can't foresee someone's death. At the beginning of the student movement, there weren't all that many students on the square. Then the regime, in its ham-handed wisdom, issued an editorial in People's Daily April 26 denouncing the students for their protests and occupation of the square and questioning their motives, which only angered the students and added momentum to the movement. After the editorial, the movement grew rapidly, to the point that there were hundreds of thousands of students occupying the heart of downtown Beijing. Still the regime did nothing. We knew something was very wrong, but we had no idea what the divisions were within the leadership, or who was arguing with who.

Q: Was there an equivalent there of a criminal element who might have been taking advantage of the situation? Was there any evidence of that?

MOHR: No, it was a movement clearly led by college students.

Q: Well I remember watching it on TV. I also recall that at the time of the Gorbachev visit, seeing Gorbachev sort of being hustled into the back entrance. It was rather remarkable.

MOHR: Gorbachev's visit was to be the crowning achievement in Deng Xiaoping's career in terms of foreign policy, the foreign policy equivalent to his domestic policy achievement of reforming the economy and moving it forward. But the students ruined Gorbachev's visit. They were out on the square protesting, the international media was broadcasting the images to the world, and it looked like the Chinese leadership had lost control of the downtown of their capitol city. In Chinese cultural terms, the students made Deng Xiaoping lose face, and he was furious. I believe that the student movement having made a mockery of the Gorbachev visit was one of the reasons that Deng decided to use lethal force “to teach the students a lesson.”

One ironic fallout from the student movement vis-#-vis the Gorbachev visit was that the USG “worry quotient” was greatly ratcheted down. From the time of the announcement of the visit, the U.S. government's public stance was that no one was worried. In fact, they were extremely worried. We at the embassy were told to devote all reporting resources exclusively to the visit. I was put in charge of coordinating these efforts. I was told that Gorbachev's visit was to be the biggest event for the embassy that year. Clearly, Washington was concerned that the strategic winds were about to shift and that the rapprochement between the Soviet Union and China would mean some kind of net strategic loss for the United States. In the event, the death of Hu Yaobang and the rise of the student movement totally marginalized Gorbachev's visit. As one example, I recall that the front page of the People's Daily on the day of Gorbachev's visit devoted only a tiny article in the bottom right hand corner of page one to it. All other space on page one of the paper was covered by pictures and stories of the students massing on Tiananmen Square.

The Tiananmen Incident occurred on Saturday-Sunday, June 3-4. On Tuesday, amidst the chaos, I received a call from the Chinese foreign ministry, informing me that if I was still interested, I could be briefed on Gorbachev's visit the following Saturday. What would have been the most important report of my tour in Beijing now would be only a side show. I called Washington to see if they were interested in my going to receive the read-out. I was told to go and write up the report, but the person on the other end of the line said: “Of course, you realize no one is going to read it.”

Q: Well I can imagine, you couldn't not do it.

MOHR: So true.

Q: What about during the time Gorbachev was there, could you attend?

MOHR: No, it was a bilateral visit. We were not invited.

Q: There was no great meeting with the diplomatic corps in the Great Hall of China, with toasts and all of this?

MOHR: Not that I recall.

Q: Probably at the Chinese restaurant around the corner.

MOHR: Well, the banquet was in the Great Hall of the People, which is right in Tiananmen Square. To get there, you had to go through all the students. It was a mess. Kids were running around, jumping, screaming and protesting. As I said, it was a big loss of face for the leadership, and incredible when you think all of this was taking place under the governance of one of the most tightly controlled communist parties in the world. But as I said, the leadership was deeply divided as to how to handle the situation, so for many weeks there was paralysis, and the students did their thing.

Q: Were you, and when I say you I am talking about the political section and all, picking up anything, of course it would be the Soviet embassy at the time about this?

MOHR: There were all sorts of rumors in April and May that the visit was going to be postponed. We would go to the Soviets and they would say that the visit was going to take place. I mean that was all we would get out of them.

Q: Returning to the night of June 4, what I have heard is that first they tried to use troops of the Beijing garrison, and that they weren't reliable and they had to basically go out and get peasants or something.

MOHR: Unreliable is putting it mildly. The military leaders of the Beijing Military Region refused to carry out the orders to fire on the public. It took Deng Xiaoping about six weeks to find troops from other regions who were willing to carry out the order to shoot the students.

Q: Well let's talk about when you first arrived in Beijing in the summer of 1988. Were you getting any people talking about the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution, basically all these horrible things that happened to just about everybody.

MOHR: Chinese officials would never talk about such things, but shopkeepers and taxi cab drivers, ordinary people would. You realized almost every Chinese person had a “story,” and almost all of them were of sadness and suffering. One thing I learned in the weeks after I arrived was that although Mao had been extremely popular with undergraduates and leftists in the U.S., almost no Chinese had a good word to say about his rule from 1949 to 1976. Actually, the stories people told me were so sad that it got to the point where I just got exhausted hearing about them. And then Tiananmen happened.

Q: Well at the time after the shooting and all, were you looking to see what was happening in the rest of China, in Shanghai for example?

MOHR: Of course. We have consulates in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenyang and Chengdu, and the reporting from those posts was excellent. There were student movements in all the major cities. Shanghai's was the largest outside of Beijing, but no one was shot. They never used lethal force. They somehow successfully got the students dispersed without any loss of life. Ziang Zemin was the leader in Shanghai. I believe after it was all over, the reason why he was appointed to be head of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was because of the way he successfully handled the student movement in Shanghai. So in the provinces there were a lot of copycat movements to mimic what was going on in Beijing, but they never got totally out of hand. It seemed that the provincial leadership, especially in Shanghai, did a much better job of handling the student protests so they didn't escalate into violence. Nonetheless, my theory is that lethal force was never necessary in Beijing either, but Deng had suffered so much during the Cultural Revolution, which was powered by students, and he was so angry with the students over the fiasco of the Gorbachev visit, that he wanted to use lethal force so that the students, and anyone

else in Chinese society so inclined, would never ever again be tempted to protest against the regime like that.

Q: We are talking about students they were essentially the Red Guard weren't they?

MOHR: During the Cultural Revolution they were the Red Guards. During the Tiananmen Incident, they were just students. They organized themselves into a form of government around Tiananmen Square, but they had no special name. They were just college-aged kids.

Q: The Red Guards were young kids too, but they had proved to be sort of under the tutelage of Mao to be as nasty as you can imagine.

MOHR: Exactly, and the students of 1989 reminded Deng of all of those unpleasant experiences of the Cultural Revolution. After all, one of his brothers was killed, and his son was thrown off a building and crippled for life. This was all at the hands of the Red Guards, of students. So I believe Deng wanted to use lethal force, even though it was not necessary. The regime of course insisted that it was necessary. However, I was a witness to the events. At the height of the student movement, sometime in May, there were hundreds of thousands of students at Tiananmen. They filled the entire square. But by the beginning of June, enthusiasm had waned, and I estimated the number of students at Tiananmen Square on Saturday morning, June 3, at no more than five thousand.

Then something curious happened. Loudspeakers around the city began telling people not to gather around the square that evening. All day long, the loudspeakers blared: “People, do not come to Tiananmen Square this evening.” So naturally, thousands of people came to Tiananmen Square that evening, and once again the square was filled with people. But these were just observers, not student squatters. However, the regime could now claim that once again the square was filled, and that no regime could let the heart of its capital be controlled by an unruly mob. They insisted afterward that because of the great number of people who had taken over the square, they were compelled to use lethal force

to regain control. But this claim was bogus. The real number of people by the night of June 3 occupying the square was far closer to just a few thousand. Twice as many police, with clubs, could have cleared the square. But the regime wanted to clear the square with the army, using rifles, and live ammunition.

Q: OK, the shooting takes place, what happens then? Did everything shut down as far as we were concerned?

MOHR: Yes it did. For a day or two afterwards, there was not even any place open to buy food. One of the secretaries had a huge jar of peanut butter. That's what we ate for two days, until the owners of the food stores and restaurants came back later in the week. Our apartments also didn't have water, so the embassy rented out a hotel room at the Jianguo Hotel, within walking distance from the Embassy. There was a sign-up sheet at the embassy for the hotel room, in order to go there and shower or bathe.

Q: What about after Tiananmen? Was the Chinese government almost closed off to the embassy?

MOHR: It was almost totally closed off. Since the PRC official line was that China didn't do anything wrong, and that all sanctions against China, including those from other foreign governments, were originated and orchestrated by the U.S., we were not very popular with the Chinese government. So every Chinese government agency was closed off to us. This lasted several months. The only contact we had was a once-a-week meeting at the foreign ministry. The ambassador was called in to be lectured to on how bad we were, and why the sanctions needed to end. (U.S. sanctions, imposed by President Bush, included an end to all military cooperation and a ban on high-level Chinese visits to the U.S.) I was the note-taker at the weekly meetings between the ambassador and the senior Chinese foreign ministry official, Liu Huaqiu. Otherwise, there was nothing to do. Many of us worked out in the newly opened health clubs, and the Chinese language officers

studied Chinese. It was most strange. We were an embassy, but the host government would not talk to us.

Q: Could you get out into the countryside or travel?

MOHR: To go anywhere outside of Beijing, even in normal times, required permission from the Chinese government. In the months after Tiananmen, we couldn't go anywhere.

Q: The same thing was happening to our consular officers?

MOHR: Yes, in terms of travel. Another thing that really bothered the Chinese was that we gave political asylum to astrophysicist and dissident Fang Lizhi. He lived on the ambassador's compound. They registered their dislike about that. But with the man-in-the-street, we were extremely popular. People would walk up to me on the street and ask if Fang was at the embassy. When I would reply that he was, they would give me the thumbs up sign.

Q: How about other embassies?

MOHR: That is a good question. I think we were the only ones who got the cold shoulder. I remember the Japanese having a parliamentary visit about a month or two later. The visiting delegation had a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Peng, and this is where Li gave a most interesting explanation of the Tiananmen Incident. Li said that China had 40 years of uninterrupted peace since the communists took over in 1949, so they had no water cannon or rubber bullets to deal in a non-lethal way with massive crowd control/ unrest. (This was of course a huge lie: millions died during the see Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution saw over a decade of violence and upheaval.) Li continued his remarks to the Japanese, assuring them that China was acquiring water cannon and rubber bullets, so next time would be different. I interpreted Li's remarks as the closest we would ever get to the Chinese government admitting they had made a mistake, but of course that was not enough for President Bush, who was demanding the Chinese

apologize publicly before we would lift sanctions. I think the French may have gotten the cold treatment as well, because the French were particularly upset. Tiananmen occurred while they were celebrating the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, and the French gave political asylum to many of the student leaders.

Another noteworthy point was in those days, China really had little knowledge of how the U.S. worked. Now with all the thousands of returning students from the U.S., they have a lot more sophisticated view of us. But in those days, many of the leaders, and many within the Chinese government, really believed that somehow the U.S. was behind the student movement. And we could not convince them otherwise.

Q: All right, but were you trying to analyze things, like what was going on in the politburo? When one looks at 1979 in the Kremlin and saw their actions in invading Afghanistan, was there a feeling that this was something similar, a last stand of the old guard?

MOHR: Well, it certainly was an overreaction on the part of Deng Xiaoping, and we didn't know whether or not the leadership would be able to maintain its rule, because the people were certainly outraged. But the only thing we could do was observe and see how things would play out. What we didn't know at the time was that the moderates had completely lost out, and the hardliners were in firm control. Deng was an aged leader, but there were many hardliners like Li Peng, who were only in their 50s or 60s.

Q: Was there certain feelings of being let down among the China hands? I felt this and I was long out of it after five years in Yugoslavia. You know the Serbs are the sons of bitches that let me down by how awful they were, and I will never feel the same. I was wondering how this affected you.

MOHR: Well, the Chinese people didn't let me down. The Chinese government was less than ideal, and it was the government which had demonstrated the lengths it was willing to go in order to retain power. It was a communist government. Mao had put the people through decades of suffering, so no one should have been too surprised. It's just that

we didn't have relations with China during Mao's bouts of political madness in the 1950s and 1960s, so no American was on the scene to witness and record the events at that time. Furthermore, as I said, no one believed China's rulers would actually shoot the students. This was a function of our naivet#, our lack of understanding of Deng and the other leaders. In hindsight it was clear, given the amount of suffering Deng had endured during the Cultural Revolution and the weeks of humiliation the leadership suffered while the students had control of downtown Beijing, especially during the Gorbachev visit, that the leadership might feel it necessary to shoot so that no one in the society would ever take to the streets again to oppose the regime.

Q: Did you get any feedback from your people in the consular section about Chinese students in the United States? Were they ordered back, or what was happening there?

MOHR: Yes, in general the Chinese were smart enough to leave students in the U.S. alone, and when they returned, they weren't hassled. At least, we never heard any stories from the students in the U.S. or those returning to China that they were being given a hard time.

Q: Well when you left there were things in still sort of a stand down?

MOHR: The Chinese government started reengaging with us in the fall of 1989, and the man responsible was Richard Nixon. He came out for a visit. I believe it was in November. The day before he was to visit the embassy, he told Li Peng that he was going to visit the embassy, which he understood was surrounded by armed militia. He wanted the Chinese to withdraw the militia immediately. Now these militia were put there after Tiananmen, supposedly for our safety, but they were really there to hassle us. They were young and untrained. Often they would point their rifles as us. Presumably, the rifles weren't loaded, but it was still creepy. Ambassador Lilly asked the White House to protest, but for whatever reason, no one did. However Nixon did, and since Nixon had met with Mao in 1972 and had normalized relations, he had tremendous status. So Li Peng had to

grant his request. The militia was removed, and shortly after Nixon returned home, the Chinese started reengaging with us. By the time I left, I think it was May 1990, relations had improved somewhat. But as they say, when things hit rock bottom, they have no place to go but up.

Q: Well there was quite a controversial visit probably early on, was it Scowcroft?

MOHR: Ah, yes, the Scowcroft visit. He was head of the NSC, and Bush sent him to China, I think it was around the time of their national day, in October 1989, to try and see if relations could resume. Scowcroft made some routine toast to the health of the leadership, but these were the people who still had the blood of the students on their hands. We in the embassy were livid about Scowcroft, but there was nothing we could do. Speaking of people who made us sick, there was always Alexander Haig. What he did was far worse than what Scowcroft did. He attended Chinese national day celebrations on October 1. The celebrations were at Tiananmen Square, and that year, they celebrated the “victory” of the forces of law and order over the students. And Haig sat there, watched the “celebrations,” and saluted the leadership. It made us all at the embassy very hostile to Haig. This of course was the same person who, seven years before, thought it would be an excellent idea to negotiate with the Chinese to end U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. I might add that shortly after Haig left office in 1982, he wanted to broker an arms sale of the most sophisticated U.S. helicopters to Taiwan. (It was refused.) So you can see that Haig was never one of my favorite people.

Q: Oh yes, he is still alive.

MOHR: Well I am sure his company is successful, and has many financially rewarding ties to China. (Note: Haig passed away on February 20, 2010.)

Q: Well that is in general what I am talking about; there has always been this fascination almost adoration of China in America and in Europe.

MOHR: That is why I went into Chinese studies. I was fascinated by China. I really like the Chinese people, although even now, they have a really terrible form of government.

Q: Did you find this sort of screwed up things sort of from our policy view, I mean the fact that so many cabinet members wanted to come and go to the Great Wall and so on?

MOHR: Yes, I am glad I went into Chinese studies, but I try to remain objective. These visitors, senior U.S. officials and otherwise, just seemed spellbound by the Chinese. Now, I think there is a lot we can learn from China, especially in the way they organize their society and their social values; for example, how they react and cope with discomfort, suffering, personal setbacks, and their tight family structure. It is true that this traditional kind of society is breaking down as the Chinese become more industrialized and westernized. But I believe that the way Chinese society is organized is worthy of our respect. On the other hand, their governing system is just ridiculous. It is a communist dictatorship. It lacks popular backing, the people have no interest at all in communist ideology, and if the regime didn't produce great economic gains year after year, they would be in political trouble.

Q: Well one of the things that interests me is the question, does the writ of Beijing go out into the provinces or are there dukedoms out there or what?

MOHR: In the early part of the 20th century, there were warlords or dukedoms, so to speak. But not now. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) did a decade-long study after Tiananmen as to why the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989. One of their conclusions was that the Soviets let the provincial party structure atrophy, so the CCP has spent a tremendous amount of time, energy and money to bolster provincial and lower levels of the party, including having them study things like management training. There is a wonderful book by Professor David Shambaugh of George Washington University, China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation, which documents all this.

Q: Well did you find that communist ideology still permeated the system, because I have talked to people who served in Poland who said by the time martial law was declared there may have been three or perhaps four communists in the whole country. Was that going on?

MOHR: After the Tiananmen Incident, in a country of one billion people, there were perhaps three or four who still believed in communism. Actually, no one believes in communist ideology any more. But party leaders certainly believe in the CCP as the only organization capable of governing a country the size of Europe. From an ideological point of view, all Mao's campaigns turned people off, and the Tiananmen Incident sealed it. People believe in the opportunity to get rich, and the party has been successful to date in delivering an improvement in the people's economic well-being, year after year. So long as the party accomplishes this goal, the people will allow themselves to be governed by the party. Communist ideology plays no role in this. Ideology is gone.

Q: Well what about while you were there in 1988?

MOHR: Ideology was pretty much gone by 1988 as well, but as I noted, the Tiananmen Incident really completed the people's dislike of the Chinese Communist Party and its ideology.

Q: Do Chinese universities still teach courses in Marxist ideology?

MOHR: I don't really know. The party certainly gives courses in Chinese-style Marxism. Current party chief (and president) Hu Jintao was head of the party school for 10 years, in the 1990s, so courses in Marxist thinking are still being given. But basically, no one really believes in them. I think Hu believes Marxist thinking is useful, but he is one of the few.

Q: Marxism has always been a favorite academic exercise and it is taught in the States at our universities.

MOHR: The appeal in China is long gone. In the early 1990s, Deng Xiaoping said it is glorious to be rich. That is now the people's anthem. It is sort of like 19th century U.S. frontier capitalism.

Q: OK, well you left in May 1990. Where did you go?

MOHR: I went back to be deputy director of the China desk. I felt that in the aftermath of Tiananmen, the China desk just didn't support the people in the field to the degree I felt they should. For example, when people inquired about their personnel assignments, often there was no response from Washington for days or weeks. So, I wanted to be in the Department and support the troops in the field, so to speak. Ambassador Lilly told me to take the job as deputy director of the Korea desk. He said there were sensitive issues going on with North Korea's nuclear program, and if I took the job on the Korea desk, chances were I would be promoted. He said all I could do on the China desk was keep the relationship from collapsing, and unfortunately, promotions are usually geared to something positive happening, not from preventing something from getting worse. Lilly proved to be correct. In the two years following, while I was on the China desk, no one there got promoted, but people on the Korea desk did. However, I was comfortable with my decision. I made sure that any inquiry from the embassy was answered within 24 hours, even if it was only an interim reply stating the reasons why a definite reply could not be made.

Q: So we will pick this up next time in 1990 when you are on the China Desk.

MOHR: Yes, the chaos of the China desk.

Q: Great.

Q: All right today is January 4, 2010.

MOHR: That is right. Tomorrow is my birthday and I will be 65 and eligible for Social Security. I am very happy.

Q: Well Mark, happy social security. I have been on it. I am 81 now, so I have been hanging on to the government for many years. Well where are we now?

MOHR: It is 1990, and I am returning home from China.

Q: Ok, but let's talk a little more about the year after Tiananmen, from 1989-1990. Let me ask something. I know how important the foreign service national staff is in so many countries. Frankly this is where your continuity comes from. I know in Yugoslavia these were people who had been around and could say we have done that before and they have the connections.

MOHR: I agree. The foreign service nationals (FSNs) provide the continuity.

Q: How important let's say prior to Tiananmen were they?

MOHR: Well unfortunately China, being a communist country and somewhat of an adversary, was different. No Chinese FSNs were allowed in the political section. The FSNs in the embassy worked only in the non-classified sections, helping out in consular and administrative work. The only FSN I do remember was in the administrative section, doing travel. We later found out that he was a senior official in the ministry of state security, which wasn't a surprise. Because of his position, he could get tickets on any plane flights, or if the planes were full, he could bump Chinese people and get our people seats. Needless to say, this was invaluable during times of Congressional visits.

Q: Was there any feeling that an awful lot of our work is not secretive, and what you want to do is say how do you think this will play or something like that? Was there any thought of let's get somebody whether they are high ranking or not so we can use them to play the system?

MOHR: Not in political or economic work. Our phones were bugged, our phones at home were also bugged. The technology was fairly primitive at the time. Often, when you picked up your phone, you would hear a loud click as their tape recorder went on. China was just too closed a society at that time. The best source of information, outside of our Chinese contacts, when they were talking to us, was U.S. journalists. They often spoke Chinese, and had excellent contacts among the Chinese students at the various universities, including foreign students at the Chinese universities. I remember particularly a group of Hungarian students were particularly helpful, as were a few American students.

Q: What about your own internal political section?

MOHR: My job was deputy director of the political section, and also chief of the external section. So I was responsible for reporting on China's foreign policy. Because of the Gorbachev visit, I was very busy devoting all my time to that. China's internal political scene had been quiet for several years, so internal reporting was not a priority, and those doing it really didn't have good contacts, and almost none among the Chinese academic community.

Q: How about the other embassies, the British?

MOHR: The British, Japanese, and others were all taken by surprise by Tiananmen. As we said, the ones with the best contacts on the scene were the American journalists, particularly Dan Southerland of the Washington Post, David Schweisberg of UPI, and Mike Chinoy of CNN. It also didn't hurt that David and Mike were personal friends of mine. I am mentioned several times in Mike Chinoy's book, China Live.

Q: Did you all sort of get together pretty often and see what the hell was going on, or were things going in a way rather calmly and so there wasn't much concern over what was going on?

MOHR: Before Tiananmen, things usually proceeded rather calmly. But the Fang Lizhi incident during Bush's visit of February 1989 stirred things up, and after Hu Yaobang died in April, all hell broke loose. We began getting together to talk on a daily basis. Then martial law was declared, and Gorbachev came, and it got even more hectic.

Q: After it was over did it have any lasting effect?

MOHR: Gorbachev's visit?

Q: Yes.

MOHR: No, nobody cared in China at the time. The regime was too busy trying to maintain stability. As I mentioned, it probably added to Deng Xiaoping's motivation to use lethal force against the students. In subsequent years, though, the Chinese and the Russians seem to have put most of their differences behind them, so perhaps Gorbachev's visit was indeed significant.

Q: You previously mentioned Congressman Steven Solarz, whom I have interviewed, by the way. China has always been a place that seems to attract congressmen; China seems to appeal to Americans. It is a drawing card; the celestial kingdom and all that.

MOHR: So true.

Q: How did you find these Congressional trips to China? Were they fairly brief?

MOHR: In the year before Tiananmen, they were fairly frequent. I believe they had value. Contact between members of Congress and the Chinese government are important.

Q: And did they seem to come back sort of impressed by the beauty? The Chinese can put on a good show. Did you feel these visits were in a way almost counterproductive?

MOHR: No, not really. The Chinese know how to put on a good show, and make a favorable impression. One thing about the conservatives used to irritate me. They would speak critically of China to us, for example criticizing the administration for not putting enough pressure on the Chinese to have a more even playing field with regard to bilateral trade (we always had a big trade deficit with China), but then when they were with the Chinese, all they would say is, “Thank you for this delicious tea.” In other words, they were reluctant to criticize the Chinese to their faces. Solarz was a bit different in that he was like a knowledge sponge. He was very serious, and was relentless about asking questions. He clearly learned something from his visits.

Q: He was a unique case.

MOHR: Almost too much so. I recall one luncheon with a Chinese official on Tibet. Solarz asked so many rapid-fire questions that the official didn't have time to eat. His aides had to feed him.

Q: Yes, I have talked to people about what Solarz did in Africa. He would go and he would have a huge schedule.

MOHR: Morning, noon, and evening. He would go until he was exhausted.

Q: Returning to the aftermath of Tiananmen, were Chinese students still going to the States?

MOHR: I didn't work in the visa section, but I assume the Chinese government still allowed students to go to the U.S. It made sense; if there were any dissidents, better they should go abroad, where they didn't have any contact with the Chinese people. Also, we had no reports of any returning students being hassled. This is one thing you've got to give the Chinese credit for. In this area, they were being intelligent.

Q: Did you get anything about the Chinese students maybe going to America and getting infected by Americanisms and coming back and having a difficult time?

MOHR: No, nothing of the sort. The Chinese students may have been “infected” by a dose of democracy while in the U.S., but they also had seen what happened to their fellow students during Tiananmen. It had the desired chilling effect.

Q: You had mentioned in the months following Tiananmen the Embassy was surrounded by rifle-bearing militia. How did that affect the morale of embassy wives?

MOHR: They had a difficult time in the immediate days following Tiananmen, and were evacuated. So in subsequent months, they weren't there. They were evacuated. When things calmed down, the families returned.

Q: I may have asked this question before, but I will ask it again. Were we looking for control strings within the Chinese apparatus, for autonomous activities in the provinces, or was everything pretty much in Beijing?

MOHR: I was just totally focused on the central political forces in Beijing. Outside of Beijing, I think the worst protests were in Shanghai, but they were managed without resorting to lethal force. So it didn't seem like there were any serious problems throughout the country. China is almost the size of Europe, so it is a pretty big place. The real problems were in the upper echelons of leadership of the communist party, not in the regional apparatus.

Q: There is similar public unrest and shootings in Iran right now. One of the things that is always significant is that when a regime has to shoot its own people in a crowd, that often is the indicator that things are going down. In a way Iran looks like the fundamentalist regime might be in its final days. China seems to be one of the few countries that has been able to get away with this.

MOHR: Again, I would refer you to Shambaugh's work on this subject. It describes how after Tiananmen the CCP studied, for over 10 years, every socialist and other kind of long-standing political party, including the Soviet Union and Singapore, and analyzed all the good points and bad points. Then it took a look at what it felt were the weaknesses within its own system, and drew up a plan to right the wrongs. It seems to have worked. Many regime critics outside of China predicted the demise of the CCP after Tiananmen. But they're still there.

Q: Well when you talk about that part, are you talking about in a way about something not at all communist?

MOHR: They are a communist party in terms of their organization and rigid control of the political system, but nobody, including probably most of the leaders, believes in the ideology. However, they all believe that the CCP is the only institution that can govern China. An interesting thing to note is that there are over 70 million people in the Chinese Communist Party. So the CCP is bigger than most countries.

Q: But were you seeing even before Tiananmen a diminution of sort of the ideological explanation of things.

MOHR: I think by the time Mao died in 1976 there was great relief, and a diminution of ideological fervor. Mao and his constant political movements gave ideological fervor a bad name. When Deng started to institute his pragmatic economic reforms a few years later, the Chinese people breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Q: Well then let's pick up this discussion from the time you left China. When exactly did you depart?

MOHR: In May 1990.

Q: Then what did you do?

MOHR: I took the job as deputy director of the China desk. I wanted to support our people in China in any way I could, and I wanted to be a part of helping to prevent the bilateral relationship from crashing through the floor. If that happened, I felt it might take generations to get it back on track. One of the reasons, as I mentioned previously, for going to the China desk is that I felt the personnel system had not been as responsive as it could have been to the desires of our people in the field.

Q: Well let's talk about first about the personnel system, the personnel in broad administrative terms, what was the problem?

MOHR: I don't really know. Perhaps the China desk was just exhausted from the entire Tiananmen business, and the people there just didn't have the energy to put pressure on personnel to be more responsive to requests from the embassy. In those days, the embassy would send in daily cables called O-Is, which stood for official-informal communications. They involved the nitty-gritty administrative stuff, including personnel issues. We would send in questions or requests in the O-Is, and often many of our queries would go unanswered. I vowed that when I returned to the desk, every issue raised in an O-I would have a response, even if it was an interim response, within 24 hours.

Q: Talking about the communications, I represent an earlier era where we used quill pens, and clipper ships. How did it work when you were there? The internet, was that up and running by that time?

MOHR: This was 1989. There were no cell phones, there was no internet. There were just telegrams, like the O-Is.

Q: How would an O-I work?

MOHR: It was a daily cable to the Department, and it involved administrative matters. But it also included substantive matters. For example, we would comment on policy or on requests from the Department to engage the Chinese on some issue or other.

Q: Would these action messages be screened by the DCM or something to make sure you weren't wasting time?

MOHR: The screening should have been done by the China desk at State, but they didn't do that.

Q: You were on the China desk for how long?

MOHR: For two years, from 1990-1992. As I mentioned, after the Tiananmen incident, the U.S. imposed a set of sanctions against China. All military cooperation ceased, and China's leaders were barred from visiting the United States. The Congress, the media, and public opinion were all critical of this policy. They felt we should be doing more to punish China for shooting the students, especially in the economic area.

A consensus therefore built up to abolish most-favored-nation (MFN) trade status with China. If MFN were taken away from China, Chinese goods into the United States would be taxed at least at double the going rate. If that were to happen, China's trade with the U.S. would be destroyed. As trade with the U.S. was the engine of China's economy, the damage to China would be considerable, and this would probably have set back bilateral relations for decades. Thus, the task of the China desk post-Tiananmen was to preserve MFN for China. President Bush actually told the State Department directly that the China desk was to focus on preserving MFN for China. The basic threat came from Congress. There was a majority on the Hill to take MFN away. Our goal was to find 34 opposing votes in the Senate, enough to sustain a Presidential veto when the legislation passed to remove MFN from China. .

Our task was formidable. Both houses passed the legislation, and after much lobbying we succeeded in sustaining the Presidential veto by one vote; I repeat, one vote. It was a turning point in the history of the relationship, and I don't think either political scientists or historians have appreciated this event. If the vote had gone the other way, we estimated that 10 million jobs would be lost in southern China alone within 3 months of the removal of MFN. China would have suffered severe long-term economic damage. Those within China who never wanted to normalize with the U.S. would have been vindicated. They would have argued that the U.S. never wanted to see China strong and prosperous, that we always wanted to keep China down. In that case, these persons in China would have been put in charge of the bilateral relationship, and China, just like in the 1950s and 1960s, would have taken a posture of regarding the U.S. as an enemy, allying with nations with similar views. Just imagine the problems today if China were supporting Al-Qaeda, or if China were allowing Al-Qaeda bases on its territory to train. It's one thing to invade Iraq, but invading China would have been out of the question. Fortunately, nothing like that ever happened, because we won the battle to preserve MFN for China by one vote. I was the head of the task force that accomplished this.

Q: OK, how did you bring this about?

MOHR: Basic lobbying. Unfortunately, U.S. business interests refused to support us, even though we were fighting for their interests in trade with China. We're talking about billions and billions of dollars in trade here. Nevertheless, they were afraid to draw the anger of Congress, and the public. The basic argument against continuing MFN ran something like this: China still has the red blood of the students on its hands, but all the Bush administration cares about is the green of money. So U.S. business was afraid, and would not help us. We were left to our own devices. We drew up our arguments for preserving MFN, and would just call or meet with Congressional staff and the leaders of the relevant committees to press our case.

We coordinated our efforts with the Bureau of Congressional Affairs, and identified about 40 Senators who might vote in favor of MFN. Then we just went to work. Hours and hours of lobbying, that's what did it. Nancy Pelosi was in her first term in Congress, and she ran with this issue. She said she had a moral imperative to take MFN away from China. I spoke to her personally several times. I never could convince her, but it was a given that the House would vote to take away MFN. We concentrated on the Senate, trying to get the 34 votes we needed there to sustain a Presidential veto. I will never forget the day the vote was taken. I got a call from Pelosi's chief staffer who said, “You are probably celebrating right now. (Actually, we were). You shouldn't because we got a late start, so now we have a strategy in place from this very moment. We are starting today. If I were you I wouldn't celebrate too much because next year we are going to bring you down, and we are going to take away this odious Most Favored Nation status.” Fortunately, his words proved hollow: in the next year, they lost by 23 votes.

Q: Yes, but by then things had changed.

MOHR: Yes, but that was a year later. On the day, the staffer really scared me. I mean you work so hard to accomplish this goal, and after just one phone call, you think you are going to have a tougher fight on your hands over the next year, and this time you might lose. After all, on that day, we only won by one vote. It's like doing some huge research paper for school, then your computer eats it, and you have to start all over again. It really was an awful feeling.

Q: So essentially this is a three-cornered game or something. The House people were encouraging the Senate to block it. It is the Senate that decides this.

MOHR: The Senate decides when the president vetoes a bill. The House and Senate first passed a bill to remove MFN from China. Then the President vetoed the bill, and the Senate, which of course had passed the bill, now had the opportunity to override the presidential veto. But they needed a two-thirds majority to do so.

Q: You said Pelosi led the fight from the House. She is from San Francisco, isn't she?

MOHR: Yes she is, and that is one of the reasons she said she had to get involved, because so many of her constituents are Chinese. But I think this was an excuse. She was in her first term, and this issue gave her national exposure. It launched her leadership career. I would talk to her, she would call me personally and we would argue. I told her I didn't think she was right. I didn't go so far as to say that I questioned her integrity, but I don't think she really cared about the issue. I think she cared about getting her name in the newspaper on a daily basis.

Q: What about the Senate?

MOHR: Well, Jesse Helms was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC). Lucky us. I mean, here we have a Republican president, with a Republican majority in the Senate. The president is passionately in favor of preserving MFN for China, but there is no way in hell that he can convince a majority of his own party in the Senate from voting to take MFN away from China. Ironic, isn't it? And it wasn't as if we had this isolated or irrational policy. Every other major country in the world, the Europeans, the Japanese, the Australians, etc. had sanctions on China because of Tiananmen, but none, I repeat none, had any trade sanctions. So our policy was in keeping, so to speak, within international norms. Of course Congress didn't care about what anyone else in the world was doing. All it cared about was punishing the Chinese leadership for what it did at Tiananmen. But by taking MFN away, it would be punishing the Chinese people far more than the leadership, and the people had been the victims. Another irony was that this was one of the few instances where the Republican leadership in Congress would be taking an act that would hurt U.S. business interests as well, but emotions were just too high. Members of Congress had been so provoked by those T.V. images during Tiananmen that they didn't care.

There is another point I would like to make. Not only did we not have the support of U.S. business in the MFN fight, we didn't have the support of Secretary of State James Baker either. At the time, Baker had presidential ambitions. I think he felt, assuming that Bush would win again in 1992, that he could be a presidential candidate for the Republicans in 1996. I drafted three separate speeches for Baker to give supporting MFN for China. They always were returned to me with something written on the top to the effect of, “Will not deliver.” The third time this happened, I went to one of Baker's staffers and asked why the secretary would not deliver the speech. He replied, “Mark, you are so na#ve. The secretary does not do losers.” I asked him to explain, and he said MFN would be taken away from China, and the secretary did not want to back a losing cause. I got really mad, and said that so long as Baker took his paycheck from the Treasury, he was secretary of state, and he had a duty to act like one. The staffer just chuckled. The real reason for Baker's inaction was that he didn't want to anger Congress, and bring the media down on his head, in defending MFN for China. This, he felt, would damage his chances to run for president after Bush's (assumed) second term. I often wondered why the President ordered the China desk to defend MFN, but didn't order his secretary of state to do likewise.

Q: Of course this happens again and again with such people. There is nothing like presidential ambitions to screw things up.

MOHR: Right, secretaries of state shouldn't have presidential ambitions, except if you have the abilities of a Thomas Jefferson. So it was one of the things that really disappointed me. Baker wouldn't support us. The U.S. business community wouldn't support us. But we won anyway, and MFN—and the bilateral relationship—was preserved.

Q: What about the embassy of China? How did it work from your perspective?

MOHR: The embassy couldn't help. They were considered poison, any Chinese government official was.

Q: Didn't they have any clout or influence on the Hill?

MOHR: Then? No, they were just members of a country that was universally reviled. They were treated like lepers. Also, at that time, they didn't have any office in their embassy that dealt specifically with Congress. It was not until 1994 that they established a unit in their embassy to deal with the Hill. Although their first diplomatic office was set up in 1972, and an embassy in 1979, the Chinese were so ignorant of our political system that they thought, just as in China, the legislature in the U.S. was just a rubber stamp, and the executive was all that mattered. Although we constantly tried to persuade them of the importance of Congress, they wouldn't listen, that is, until 1994.

Q: This has always been a problem with embassies. When people first arrive they think that their main contact point is the State Department. The main contact point should be the media and Congress.

MOHR: And the NSC.

Q: Yes, I recall interviews that I have had revealing that the difference between Pakistan and India was that the Indian embassy would only come to somebody of comparable rank, maybe an assistant secretary, whereas the Pakistanis would get right down to the lowliest desk officer and cultivate that person. It showed, because the Indians were very hyped on protocol, and that is not what you want. You have got to reach out all over the place. Who was the assistant secretary for East Asia?

MOHR: In 1990, it was Richard Solomon. He knew Baker's opinion concerning the issue, so he focused his attention on Cambodia. Ironically, Solomon had a Ph.D. in Chinese studies. Have you talked to Solomon?

Q: Yes I have.

MOHR: What did he say? Well, it will be interesting to read what he said.

Q: You can pick it up on the internet. My interview with him is on the internet.

MOHR: Where on the internet?

Q: You Google frontline diplomacy and then go to the S. It will be there. Now as I did those interviews, the earlier ones, they were not obviously as detailed. Perhaps I didn't get into his views on MFN. Maybe I didn't get to this interesting point.

MOHR: I agree it will be interesting, because I am sure he was aware that the President had given it top priority, but he spent the majority of his time on Cambodian issues. His principal deputy assistant secretary, Desaix Anderson, on the other hand, was very supportive of our efforts to maintain MFN for China.

Q: Did you have much to do with the White House and the NSC?

MOHR: Not me personally. Kent Wiedemann, who was my boss, the office director for Chinese affairs, had daily contact with his NSC counterpart, Doug Paal. They spoke every day over the phone, usually from about 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., so there was daily contact between the desk and the White House.

Q: Well, could the president do things? Was he on the phone to the Congress, particularly the Senate?

MOHR: I would have to assume that the President called many senators and lobbied personally. I know for a fact that he was engaged heavily on this issue. Being a former head of the U.S. liaison office in China, President Bush had a good background and a good feel for the bilateral relationship. He really cared. It's funny, because in a way, the President was the real head of the China desk. We on the desk really didn't have much support within the building, but in the end it didn't matter, because we had the support of the President.

Q: Were the Chinese understanding of the problem and repairing things; were they cooperating on trying to show that?

MOHR: Well they didn't shoot anybody else. So I guess that was a positive. The way the Chinese saw it, they didn't do anything wrong. There had been a challenge to their regime, and they beat it back. They felt it was no one else's business. They were fairly outraged that we decided they had done something wrong and imposed sanctions on them. The President publicly called for them to apologize. That was never going to happen. So we maintained our sanctions, and they continued to criticize us and refuse to do business with the U. S. embassy.

Q: Well you must have made a trip or two to China didn't you?

MOHR: No, there was no point. Not in the years following Tiananmen. It was a stalemate, and I was too busy trying to preserve MFN for China. It was a full time lobbying job.

Q: So you did that for two years?

MOHR: Yes, there was agreement within the U.S. government that if we could preserve MFN, the Chinese would see that, despite the sanctions, we meant them no real long-term harm, that we valued the bilateral relationship and wished to maintain it.

Q: Were the Taiwanese trying to screw up the works?

MOHR: Not that I recall. I think the Taiwanese were afraid that a rupture in relations between the U.S. and the PRC would only create more tension in the Taiwan Strait and in the long run harm them as well.

Q: Well if you had horrible relations it could mean that China might use Taiwan as an external enemy or something.

MOHR: But you need to recall that in 1987, there was a big breakthrough between China and Taiwan. China agreed to allow Taiwanese to visit the mainland for the first time, and the government on Taiwan agreed to let their people go visit. So China and Taiwan had begun a process of opening up, and neither side wanted Tiananmen to affect that. As a matter of fact, while tourism from Western countries dropped over 90 percent in the year following Tiananmen, Taiwanese tourism continued unabated. I talked to some Taiwanese tourists, and they confirmed to me that they were not afraid one bit. In their opinion, Tiananmen had nothing to do with them.

Q: How about say the British and all that? Did we have much contact, did you have contact with the other embassies?

MOHR: Well as I said, the British were among the few serious China watchers in the diplomatic community, but we didn't have a lot of contact with them. However, we would occasionally discuss what we thought was going on in China with them, the Japanese, and the Soviets.

Q: When you were back in Washington did you ever talk to the Russians, I guess they would be the Soviets still, or the British?

MOHR: No, we were just too busy. We put in over 12 hours a day working on MFN and other issues in the bilateral relationship. Occasionally, foreign embassies would come in to ask about the state of U.S.-China relations, but that was about it.

Q: Again, at the level of the Secretary, there was little contact.

MOHR: Yes, as I said, Baker just didn't want to get involved. But fortunately for us, and for the state of the bilateral relationship, the President did.

Q: Well how about the second year you were there. What was that like?

MOHR: It got a little easier. As I said, on the first MFN vote, we only won by one vote. By the time of the second MFN vote, we garnered almost a majority, and we only needed one-third plus one.

Q: OK, after two years, were there any developments other than the MFN?

MOHR: That was pretty much it. The second year was much easier, much less stress. Then, I needed to focus on my next assignment. Traditionally, the deputy director of the China desk is an FSO-1, a rank equivalent to a full colonel in the military. The pattern usually was that the deputy director, on next assignment, goes to Beijing to be the political counselor. This is a senior foreign service job, and after two to three years in the job, the incumbent always had been promoted into the senior foreign service. The only problem was that I was exhausted. Two years working on the INF treaty, the last year working 16 hour days; two years in China watching things blow up and people getting shot; two years in Washington worrying day and night about MFN. I needed a rest, and being political counselor in Beijing, especially during those times, was a very stressful position. I thought about it for a long time, and instead of making a move to advance my career, I made a move to shore up my mental health. I did not apply for the job of political counselor in Beijing. Instead, I chose the position of U.S. consul in Brisbane, Australia.

Q I want to interrupt to ask if you felt those years of stress had an effect on your marriage?

MOHR: Good point, because it ended my marriage. My wife really resented all the hours I put in working on the INF Treaty. Then when I returned from China after living there by myself, my wife said that she wanted a divorce. So those years of stress and separation definitely played a role in my marriage ending in divorce, but there was also the fact that we had really grown apart. It happens.

So, I was divorced by the time I needed to think about my next assignment. Being divorced played a role in my decision to go to Brisbane rather than Beijing. In Beijing, there was still

the “non-fraternization” rule. You were not allowed, for security reasons, to be romantically involved with a Chinese woman. In Australia, on the other hand, I could date whoever I wanted. So, mainly to get a break from the stress, but also possibly to develop another relationship, I chose to go to Brisbane. I thereby gave up on the dream of becoming an ambassador.

Q: I have to say that obviously I have interviewed many people. I find myself less and less impressed by somebody who became an ambassador. OK, Whoop de doo. I mean it is all right, but it is not the be all and end all.

MOHR: Well in my own view, the timing on the road to career advancement was all wrong. I just needed a rest. Had I been in the senior foreign service, there were all sorts of relatively relaxed assignments where you could in fact have a rest, such as ambassador-in-residence. Treatment for burn-out is recognized at that level. But not at the level I was, just below that of the senior foreign service. Another factor, which I was unaware of at the time, was that I was in poor physical shape. When I met my current wife Ruth, a medical doctor, in 1997, she commented on signs of my exhaustion. She said I was out of shape from no exercise, and my breathing after a little bit of exertion was shallow and rapid. In her medical opinion, if I had continued in stressful jobs, I could have died in a few years. So, especially given that consideration, although it was in hindsight, I definitely made the right decision to go to Brisbane in 1992. I was there for three years, returned to the Department in 1995, got another job, and was told one year later, in 1996, that I did not make the promotion list based on my time in Brisbane. Therefore I would have to leave the foreign service in 1997. But I believe the decision I made in 1992, when leaving the China desk, was the correct one, even without the knowledge of the health issue. I was really tired, and I just wanted to have a tour that was fun. And the tour in Brisbane surpassed my expectations. It was thoroughly enjoyable.

Q: OK, shall we call it off now?

MOHR: All right. We can talk about my Brisbane tour at the start of our next session.

Q: Today is 27 January 2010 with Mark Mohr. Mark we are off to Australia. What are the dates you served there in Australia?

MOHR: Let's see, from the summer of 1992 to the summer of 1995. It was a three-year tour. There was very little not to like. I was the boss for the first time in my professional life. When I wanted something done, it got done. No waiting. I decided on what I wanted to report, wrote it up, edited it, approved it, and sent it out. Again, no waiting. I had a fabulous residence, with a huge lawn and a swimming pool. There were even outdoor bathrooms, so if I gave a party, the guests never had to enter the house.

Q: Was Australia and New Zealand, were these considered to be outside the real game in East Asia?

MOHR: Oh, most definitely. They certainly weren't considered career-enhancing assignments. I knew full well when I went to Brisbane that I would not get promoted into the senior foreign service. I was offered a job in 1992 as East Asian advisor in the office of the undersecretary for political affairs. This probably would have gotten me promoted into the senior foreign service. But again, in that job, you worked until 8 or 9 p.m. every night. I turned that down too. I truly needed a rest. My thinking was: better to go to Brisbane and not get promoted than to have a nervous breakdown. I just knew I wouldn't do well as a patient at St. Elizabeth's, D.C.'s local mental hospital.

Q: Well let's talk about Brisbane.

MOHR: OK. I had been dealing with the Chinese communists, both in Beijing and Washington, for four years. It was quite stressful. It was an adversarial relationship. We were not friends. So going to Australia, to an allied nation, was like entering a different world. It took me months to adjust to the fact, much like Sally Fields accepting the academy award, that the people I met “really liked me. They really liked me.” More

accurately, they genuinely liked Americans. And even though it was the early 1990s, they had received a big psychic shock during World War II. The Japanese had successfully occupied Papua New Guinea. They were very close to invading Australia. Imagine how we would have felt if the Japanese had conquered British Columbia, in Canada. There was the real possibility that Australia, a continent, would be invaded by the Japanese. In the event, the Australians felt that America was responsible for saving them, and unlike the French, they were more than willing to say thank you. And since I was the only official U.S. representative in Queensland, the province of which Brisbane is the capital, the people there felt obligated to be nice to me to show their gratitude. It was wonderful.

Q: What was working at the consulate like?

MOHR: It was small, a consulate, not a consulate-general. I was the only American, and I had five foreign service nationals (FSNs) working for me. Three did consular work, one was my administrative assistant, and one was the receptionist/chauffeur. That was Norman. He was a British immigrant. So I had a British chauffeur, very classy. The other FSNs were all female. They all were competent, and supported each other. It was the first time I had an office with no personnel problems. I was fortunate in that regard. Moreover at the time Brisbane, and the entire province of Queensland as well, was booming economically. As Australia is relatively close to Indonesia and Singapore, American companies were moving to Brisbane as their southeast Asian headquarters. It was safer, the educational system was better, and everyone spoke English. So my reporting was mostly on economic and commercial matters, although I did the occasional political piece. Reporting was not too stressful. I averaged one cable per week. I was not under any illusion that Washington was waiting with baited breath for my reports.

Q: OK, let's talk about the city of Brisbane a bit.

MOHR: The first thing you notice is the weather. It is close to perfect. Queensland is known in Australia as the sunshine state. It says so on their license plates. About ten

months of the year, the high is 85 and the low 65. Then in the summer months, January and February, it is a bit hotter. Weather has a direct effect on one's disposition, so the attitude of most people was sunny as well. They are serious about their work, but also serious about their leisure time, be it planning for what to do on weekends, or how to spend their vacations. One funny thing is that on the unusual cloudy day, people start mumbling discontentedly. If there is a second cloudy day, they start grumbling. In the rare event of a third cloudy day, they are downright unhappy. It is as if they feel they had a constitutional right to wake up in the morning and see sunshine. For most of the year, they did. I soon acquired a girlfriend who was a former Australian model and a Miss Queensland. She was Italian-Australian, with blond hair and green eyes. She was also quite social and verbal. I was on the top of the society. I was the American consul representing the country who had saved them from the Japanese during WWII. I hobnobbed with the elites of Brisbane society. People kept trying to think of ways of doing things for me. As they say in the McDonalds' commercials, I was “lovin' it.”

Q: Well did the battle of the Coral Sea syndrome die down while you were there?

MOHR: No, not at all. They observed every battle. I was required to attend every celebration of every anniversary of every WWII battle. In the 1990s, most such anniversaries were the 50th year, so they were rather big and important. One advantage was I got to know the premier, Wayne Goss, fairly well. He was from the labor party, but was progressive labor. That is to say, he believed that the best the government could do for a worker was not to provide welfare, but a job. His chief of staff was Kevin Rudd, who later went on to be a prime minister of Australia. Kevin was my friend at the time, and we would have lunch once or twice a month. He was a former Australian foreign service officer, specializing in China, so we had a lot in common.

Q: What were our interests in Brisbane?

MOHR: It was mainly the growing American commercial presence, and also helping out the Americans who had settled in the province after WWII. I remember that an uncle of John Riggins, the Washington Redskins football star, was there. Unfortunately, the consulate closed down for budgetary reasons after I left. Consulate-General Sydney now covers Queensland. So I was the last U.S. consul there. An historical footnote.

The real story of the closing is an interesting one. I found it out from the DCM. The stated reason, as noted above, was for budgetary reasons. It was a time of cutbacks, but in reality Brisbane had escaped the list of post closings. State was going to close one or two consulates in East Asia. Each post was asked to submit a rationale for its remaining open. My rationale was that a consulate's main function at that time was to provide service and opportunities to U.S. businesses. U.S. companies were increasing their presence in Brisbane. AT&T had just come in. I had recently helped secure a quarter of a billion dollar contract for a U.S. firm. There was a need for American citizen services, and most of the U.S. citizens residing in Queensland were elderly, so traveling to Sydney would be a real inconvenience for them. I found out from the DCM that my rationale was accepted, and Brisbane initially was not on the list to be cut. However, the number one consulate on the list to be cut was Sapporo in Japan. The ambassador to Tokyo at the time was former vice president Walter Mondale. Mondale called his friend, then Vice President Al Gore, and complained. Gore called State, and told it that Sapporo was to remain open. In order to keep Sapporo open, which was very expensive, State had to cut two consulates in East Asia. So Brisbane and one consulate in Indonesia, Medan, was added to the list. The incoming consul to Medan was just finishing one year of Indonesian language training at the time. She was informed that her post was to be closed, and that she had to get another assignment. Because I did not have equal or greater political influence than a former vice president, my consulate was closed as well. Another example of life being unfair.

Q: Who was the consul general in Sydney?

MOHR: At the time, it was Greg Bujac. He was a bit unusual, in that he came out of the division of security affairs (SY). He was a great guy, with great people skills, and whenever I needed something from Sydney, he would provide it. I had no doubt that he would be capable of covering Queensland as well, but it hurt that we would be closed, and that five extremely loyal and hard-working employees would be out of work.

Q: Did you try to fight the decision?

MOHR: There was nothing I could do. To make matters worse, I was informed of the closing in the following manner. The administrative counselor called, pointedly noting that he was calling on behalf of the ambassador. He told me that the decision had been made to close Brisbane, two years in the future. However, on orders from the ambassador, I was not to tell my staff. I replied, “You can't be serious.” He said, “No, I am perfectly serious. This is an order from the ambassador.” I said, “You can tell the ambassador that I will not be obeying this order. I felt it was unethical. “Correct me if I am wrong,” I said, “but what you want to do is keep these people in ignorance so they will work here. That is to say, it will be most convenient for you. No one will leave early, and you won't be faced with the difficult situation of trying to get someone new to work at a post that will be closing soon. So keep the staff in the dark, tell them nothing, and you won't be inconvenienced. Then at the last minute, when it will be really hard if not impossible for them to get another job, you will say, 'Oops sorry you are fired.' Well, I won't be a party to this. I am going to tell my staff that the consulate is closing.”

The administrative counselor said, “You realize what the consequences may be.” I replied, “Yes, the ambassador could send me home. However, I don't care. This is important to me. Throughout my career I have basically been treated decently by my superiors. However, there were times when I was not. I said to myself that when I am in a position of authority I am going to make sure the people who are working for me are treated fairly. Now was the time to act on those principles. He said, “I will talk to the ambassador.” The ambassador was Ed Perkins, who I knew and liked. I felt he was a decent person. In the

event, I was correct in my judgment, as Perkins let me stay. It all worked out. I was right to tell the staff, and the administrative counselor was wrong in his desire to keep them in the dark. By telling the staff, I secured their loyalty. They were able to plan their futures, and the earliest any staff member left was one week before the consulate closed. The department did do one nice thing: it offered jobs to two of my consular staff, in Sydney. One agreed, and one decided not to move.

Q: That is interesting because Ed Perkins essentially came out of the personnel field.

MOHR: Right.

Q: You would have thought he would have had a particular sympathy to the staff.

MOHR: Interesting point. Perhaps the whole idea not to tell the staff originated with the administrative counselor, and he just made up the stuff about the ambassador.

Q: It may have been the admin counselor trying to make things easier for himself. Good for you.

MOHR: Yes, I am very proud of that, and Perkins did support me. My staff was all Australian, and they were wonderful. They worked hard for me, and I owed it to them to support them as best I could.

Q: Well let's talk a bit about your time there.

MOHR: As I said, I did mostly commercial reporting, with a bit of local politics thrown in. The representatives of the major political parties were thrilled that I was interested in their work, and always made time for me. My predecessor had been a career consular officer, and she was not interested in political matters. In addition, a big part of my responsibilities were representational. There was a lot of public speaking, not just limited to military

anniversaries. I was asked to speak at many events. As I like to talk, this was not a problem.

Q: Well were there any military considerations, from the American military?

MOHR: Not in Brisbane. There were military anniversaries, and U.S. military representatives would attend. One time I had the commander in chief of Pacific forces (CINCPAC) visit for the 50th anniversary of the battle of the Coral Sea. In protocol terms, I outranked him. If neither the ambassador nor the DCM were present in Queensland, I was the representative of the president of the United States. Therefore, I outranked anyone in the military. This was very cool, as my personal rank was only equivalent to a colonel, but when CINCPAC, a four-star general (actually in this case an admiral), came to Queensland, I outranked him. In addition, we would have periodic visits from a U.S. nuclear submarine, which would come up the Brisbane River. Lunch with the commander and a tour of the submarine was a very coveted ticket. As I gave out the invitations, all of Brisbane's top VIPs would lobby me to be invited. I also learned what the inside of a nuclear submarine looked like. It is surprisingly small. Clearly, weapons got priority over humans.

Q: Well did you have any problem sort of equivalent to the labor left wing being opposed to our bases, our listening bases?

MOHR: No, not at all. Queensland is one of the most conservative parts of Australia. There was some concern on the part of the Australian authorities about repercussions amongst the groups of the former Yugoslavia, fighting each other and protesting U.S. policy in that region. For instance, if we took an action against the Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, there was concern that the Serbian groups in Brisbane (who numbered over 30,000) might take some harmful action against me or the Consulate. The police visited my office to assure me that they were watching and protecting me.

Q: One person I think about having been involved in that region was Tex Harris; anyway it was during the troubles in Bosnia.

MOHR: But that was the late 1990s, wasn't it?

Q: Well I think they were still having troubles then, and there was considerable migration to Australia.

MOHR: Yes, there were a lot of Serbs and Croats, even in Brisbane.

Q: Well did that play out at all...

MOHR: Not in front of the American consulate. I think they might have squabbled with each other, but it was never a concern of mine.

Q: Well, then what happened to you? Did you retire then or what?

MOHR: Well I had another year to go in my grade, after I finished my tour in Brisbane in 1995. If I didn't get promoted, and a promotion was unlikely based on my assignment in Brisbane, chances were that I would be involuntarily retired. Since prospective employers were aware of the fact that I probably wouldn't be in the Foreign Service for too much longer, I couldn't get a good job, so I was detailed to the Pentagon in the office of foreign military rights. This office was full of military lawyers and dealt with negotiating and amending status of forces agreements, the legal rights of U.S. troops when in foreign countries.

Q: They call them SOFAs, right?

MOHR: That's right, status of forces agreements, SOFAs. The head of the office, Phil Barringer, was a man in his 80s. He had written the first U.S. SOFA agreement, the NATO agreement, in 1952. I returned from Brisbane in the summer of 1995. That fall, while working in the Pentagon, I received a phone call from my personnel officer with the news

that I had not been promoted. I would therefore be selected out of the foreign service by the summer of 1996. That was it. My career was over. Although I knew it was coming, since I made the decision in 1992 to go to Brisbane rather than Beijing, it was still a blow, especially in contrast to the life-style I had just left in Brisbane. In Brisbane, I was at the top of society, socially mixing with the premier, all the top CEOs, etc. But I knew even at the time that most of the prestige was derived from my position, not from me personally. Now I was a minor functionary in a minor office at the Pentagon, and in a few months, my career as a foreign service officer, the only job identity I had ever known, would be over as well . Fortunately I had a Chinese-American friend, Tai Kuo, who had been my tennis teacher in Taipei in the early 1970s. Tai had received a full tennis scholarship to attend a small college in Louisiana, and since I was then the vice-consul in charge of visas, I had to rule on his application. His scholarship award by the U.S. college was perfectly bona-fide. The problem was that Tai had not attended a regular university in Taiwan, but a technical school. The U.S. had a requirement that you had to take an English language test, I believe it was called TESOL, and get a passing grade to demonstrate your English language capability to do college work in America. But Taiwan had a requirement that you had to attend a regular tertiary school in Taiwan to sit for the TESOL test, so he couldn't take it. Therefore, Tai was in a bind, and he came to me with his problem. He needed the U.S. visa official to waive his requirement for the TESOL test. Now, Tai could speak English much better that most Taiwanese college applicants to the U.S., because he taught many Americans tennis, including most at the embassy. His spoken English was ungrammatical, true, but he could speak and understand English, as opposed to most of the others who were going to America, whose reading ability far surpassed their spoken language skills. So I waived the TESOL requirement for Tai, and gave him his visa. He struggled at first in Louisiana, but finally got his college degree, so my decision proved correct. More than that, he went into the Chinese restaurant business, and eventually owned a string of restaurants. He became a millionaire.

We lost contact in the 1970s and 1980s, but while I was in Brisbane he found me. I received an e-mail from him. He somehow knew I might be retiring from the foreign service and asked if I would be interested in forming a company, just the two of us, to consult with the Chinese on political matters. Tai explained that, at the time, the Chinese really didn't have many people who understood the U.S. Deep down, many Chinese officials were afraid of U.S. officials, but being Chinese, they would just pretend they were in control and brazen it out. Tai explained that people were needed to explain to the Chinese what Americans were really like, to explain their thought processes, and coach them on how to deal with Americans. Basically, it was to explain to them that the U.S. really wasn't the enemy, but sincerely wanted to work with China to advance the bilateral relationship in a positive way. This sounded exactly like something I wanted to do, so I eagerly agreed to go into partnership with Tai. We set up our company in the fall of 1996, and Tai provided all the financing. He had contacts with a Chinese friendship organization in Guangzhou (formerly Canton), so we went on our first trip to China there, I think it was in November 1996. The friendship organizations were quasi-official, and they made recommendations and wrote policy papers for the government, so I knew we might be able to have some influence. I enjoyed the several days I “lectured” to the friendship organizations. I could speak frankly and bluntly to the Chinese in a way I never could as a diplomat.

I spoke basically about the 1982 communiqu# between the U.S. and China on arms sales to Taiwan. By 1996, the Chinese felt they had been outsmarted by us. U.S. arms sales to Taiwan were continuing. I told the Chinese, as I have explained previously, that it was their fault the results were not as they had hoped. They had not studied the political beliefs of Ronald Reagan carefully enough, they believed only what Secretary of State Haig told them, and they had never taken the time to speak to Reagan himself. They had only themselves to blame. I really enjoyed giving it to them, so to speak, and recall they took copious notes and asked many questions.

I also talked to them about the way their leaders went to the United States and just had a horrible press because they treated the U.S. media the way they treated their own. I said it was clear Chinese leaders knew nothing about U.S. society, and unless they learned, they would continue to have a lousy public image in America. They asked how to go about this. I explained that before a high leader was going to the U.S., there should be a practice session, or sessions, with people playing the role of the U.S. press, asking the leader pointed and difficult questions, the more difficult the better. I explained we did this in the U.S. with our senior State Department officials before they would be going to testify before Congress. We called these rehearsal sessions “murder boards.” The Chinese heard this and were alarmed. I quickly explained no one was killed in this process. It was just a name to refer to these rehearsals. Then they understood.

I was told by Tai several months later, after we returned, that the friendship organization had written up my suggestion, had sent it to Beijing, and Beijing had adopted the recommendation. It was the first recommendation to Beijing submitted by the Guangzhou group to be adopted by Beijing, and they were all thrilled. They wanted me to meet with them two or three times a year. So our consultancy business had started out really well. But there soon arose one problem. A friend at State told me, according to U.S. law, that if you were going to advise a foreign government on how to deal with the U.S., you had to register as a foreign agent with the Department of Justice (DOJ). I called DOJ and found out that this was no ordinary application. You had to register with the criminal division of the DOJ. This really bothered me. Friends at State said it was no big deal. Kissinger and others, after all, were giving all sorts of advice to foreign governments, so they were all registered in this way. But I had a bad feeling. Tiananmen had occurred in 1989. It was now 1996. The Chinese were still in bad odor with the USG, and I was not so fond of leading Chinese officials myself. I could see the possibility where I might do something inadvertently, and I certainly didn't want to be held criminally liable. Neither Tai nor I were lawyers. I mulled over my feelings for several weeks, then fate intervened.

I received a phone call from Chuck Kartman. Chuck was then ambassador for North Korean negotiations for the Clinton administration, and an old friend from embassy Tokyo in the late 1970s. Chuck wanted me to join the North Korean division of the Korean desk. I could work as a WAE (when actually employed), which meant I could work half-time at State, and continue to receive my full retirement benefits. You recall I had been in the Peace Corps in Korea, and was certainly curious about North Korea. When Chuck told me my job would include trips to North Korea, I agreed to go back to State. I informed Tai that I was quitting our partnership. He was not happy, but he understood.

Now a little background on U.S.-North Korean relations is in order. I started my job on the Korea desk in the spring of 1997. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the U.S. had suspected that the North Koreans were starting a nuclear weapons program. They had a nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, and we believed the North Koreans were using the reactor to burn uranium. The spent fuel thus produced contained plutonium, nuclear weapons-grade material. After much tension, we concluded a bilateral agreement with the North Koreans in 1994, commonly referred to as the Agreed Framework (AF). Under this agreement, North Korea would freeze and eventually eliminate its nuclear weapons program. In return we would provide it with two light-water nuclear power reactors (LWRs) to produce electricity. After I was on the job several months, Chuck took me into his office and explained that my immediate boss, Joel Wit, was going to a think tank to write a book on the negotiations which led to the signing of the AF in 1994. The negotiations leading up to the AF were lead by Ambassador Robert Gallucci. Joel had been on his staff.

Chuck told me that someone had to replace Joel, and he wanted me to do it. So in the summer of 1998, I was back at State full time leading the Agreed Framework Division in the Office of Korean Affairs in the East Asia and Pacific Bureau of the Department of State. Life can sometimes be ironic. Two years ago, I had been selected out of the foreign service. Now, two years later, I was a full-time employee at the State Department, doing

important and interesting work. Of course, bureaucratically, I had to freeze my retirement pay, and I became a civil servant. But I was happy to do so.

Q: Tell me, what were your impressions of dealing with the North Koreans?

MOHR: The North Koreans were difficult to deal with. They are the only people who practice confrontational diplomacy. They will actually yell at you. I think it's tactical: they know that this upsets people, and gives them a certain advantage. On the other hand, they have a leader at the top who makes all the decisions. There are no checks and balances, so once they make a decision, for example to freeze their nuclear weapons program, it gets done. I thought they were very good at dealing from a position of weakness, pretending they were strong and strutting around and blustering, and getting people to respond to their agenda.

I am a bit critical of the Clinton administration's North Korea policy. To be fair, their errors were ones of “benign neglect.” After the signing of the AF, the president and the secretary of state went on to other issues, such as the Middle East, thinking the major “lifting” had been done, and all that was left was the execution of the agreement. Well anyone with experience in diplomacy knows that the implementation of an agreement is just as important as the negotiation. In this case, with the AF, the North Koreans had to take all their actions within one month: to freeze their nuclear weapons program, etc., while the main U.S. obligation, to build two LWRs, did not have an explicit timeframe. To make matters more complicated, Clinton signed separate agreements with the South Koreans and Japanese whereby they agreed to finance the LWRs. Clinton knew that Congress would never agree to a multi-billion dollar aid package to North Korea. Our only financial obligation, under the AF, was to supply North Korea with heavy fuel oil (HFO) for North Korea's existing electric power plants until the first LWR came on line. This was a financial commitment of tens of millions of dollars, much less that the two LWRs, which was initially estimated at just under six billion dollars, but would probably cost much more. So the South Koreans and Japanese agreed on paper to finance the LWRs, but then dragged

their feet. In the event, their money only started flowing for the LWRs in 2000. The North Koreans got the impression, and I don't think anyone can blame them here, that they had been tricked, that the U.S. didn't really mean to implement the AF.

For the two years while I worked on the Korean desk, I received weekly complaints from the then political counselor at the North Korean mission to the United Nations, Kim Myong-gil. Kim noted that, although there had been much construction on site in preparation for the LWRs, there was still no construction on the LWRs themselves. He said North Korea had fulfilled all its obligations under the AF, and the U.S. was clearly “insincere.” He said we needed to start building the LWRs. I said that the problem was with South Korea and Japan. He noted this was not a North Korean problem. Since the AF was a bilateral agreement, it was the U.S. responsibility either to secure the financing or finance the project itself. After hearing this complaint many times, one day I finally replied, “So what you're saying is that the U.S. should act like an imperial hegemon, grab South Korean and Japan by their necks, and squeeze them until the money comes out.” He replied, “Yes, exactly so.” I had to suppress a laugh.

In point of fact, Kim was right. During the time I was on the Korea desk, I repeatedly called the official at the NSC in charge of non-proliferation, Gary Samore, and argued that he needed to explain the situation to the President, and either have the President or the Secretary of State contact their counterparts in the South Korean and Japanese governments and put pressure on them until funds were made available to build the LWRs. Gary would always listen politely, but nothing ever got done. This was particularly galling as Gary had been part of the negotiating team with Ambassador Gallucci that produced the AF. He of all people should have understood the importance of getting the funds flowing to build the LWRs, and the danger of the North Koreans coming to the conclusion that the U.S. never intended to build them, but just wanted to freeze their nuclear program. So I was very frustrated.

During my year when I replaced Joel, there was one crisis, but it was not induced by the North Koreans. The costs for the HFO rose every year beginning with 1995, but Congressional appropriations did not keep up. The organization charged with implementing the AF was the Korean Peninsula Economic Development Organization (KEDO), based in New York City. It was made up of the United States, Japan, and South Korea, the number one economic power in the world, the number two, and at the time, the number 12. In short, the members of KEDO were rich, and especially so in comparison to North Korea. Yet, since the United States was responsible for providing HFO to North Korea, and since appropriations for the fuel did not cover the costs, I was not surprised in 1998 to receive a call from KEDO stating that after the next shipment of HFO to North Korea, KEDO was broke. There could be no further shipments of fuel oil to North Korea under the Agreed Framework until more money could be secured. I immediately wrote a memo to the Secretary, pointing out that we were in crisis and something had to be done. I had written similar memos before, saying that KEDO was going broke and that if nothing were done, there would be a crisis in the future. I was ignored. Now that a crisis was imminent, the Secretary called a meeting, ordered that certain funds be transferred to KEDO, and a crisis was averted.

Of course, while I was frustrated by what I considered a lack of focus on the part of the Clinton administration, I didn't realize that events were going to get much worse under the Bush administration. Whereas Clinton merely failed to give the AF priority, Bush and his people, who never liked the agreement, were determined to blow it up. Their goal was to find an excuse to tear up the Agreed Framework. By then, I was in a different position. Joel Wit returned to the Korea Desk in 1999, and it just didn't work out, the two of us being there together. Fortunately, a position opened up in the Department of Energy (DOE), working on the spent fuel part of the AF. The North Koreans, at their reactor in Yongbyon, had produced over 6,000 spent fuel rods. They contained enough plutonium for several nuclear bombs. They were stored at the bottom of a pool at a facility next door to the reactor. It turns out that water is an excellent insulation against nuclear radiation. So

under the AF, the North Koreans allowed a team of experts from the U.S. to transfer the spent rods to canisters, then seal the canisters under U.N. supervision. Within the USG, DOE was assigned the task of canning the spent fuel rods. The officer in charge of this at DOE got promoted in 1999, and went to another job. We had been having trouble at State coordinating our policy with DOE, so I argued successfully with Ambassador Kartman that he should transfer me to DOE to work on the spent fuel canning project. I could communicate easily with the Korea desk, so coordination between the two departments would be vastly improved. DOE agreed, so in the fall of 1999, I transferred over to the Department of Energy.

By 2001, with the advent of the Bush administration, it was clear the AF was in trouble. During the first NSC meeting on North Korea, the leading White House official declared if North Korea did not live up to its obligations under the AF, the U.S. would suspend its funding of the LWRs. We had to point out to him that the South Koreans and Japanese were funding the LWRs, not the U.S. Eventually, by 2002, the Bush administration discovered that the North Koreans were cheating on the AF, by starting up a uranium enrichment program. This was probably true, but the uranium enrichment program was in its infancy, so the proper thing to do was to tell the North Koreans: we caught you cheating, now stop it. Instead, we stopped the shipments of HFO, punishing North Korea for its cheating. The North Koreans reacted by declaring the AF null and void, kicking out the U.N. inspectors at Yongbyon, unsealing the canisters, and removing the spent fuel. They then began reprocessing the rods and extracting the plutonium. Eventually, they tested some nuclear weapons, beginning in 2006. So the Bush policy, described as brilliantly tough by its advocates, only succeeded in going from a situation whereby North Korean nuclear material was completely under our control to one whereby the nuclear material was completely back in the hands of the North Koreans. We allowed North Korea to become a nuclear weapons state. It was an incredibly disastrous U.S. policy. However in Bush's second term I believe he finally “got it” by giving Secretary of State Rice the green light to try and restart negotiations with the North Koreans under Ambassador Chris

Hill. By then it was probably too little, too late. I believe North Korean leader Kim Jong Il felt Bush was hostile to him, so he (Kim) would never really engage with Bush. North Korea was left with nuclear weapons, and even now, the negotiations are not back on track.

By 2005, since North Korea would not come to the negotiating table, my job at DOE was reduced to supervising grants to various non-governmental organizations which would hold seminars on ways to reduce nuclear tensions in Northeast Asia. Finally, DOE abolished my job, in the summer of 2005. You are really in a strange position when someone abolishes your job and you agree with them. So I left DOE, and got a job at the Woodrow Wilson Center in D.C., organizing seminars involving leading scholars on China, Japan and Korea.

Q: What was happening in Pyongyang, I mean what was it like to go there?

MOHR: Interesting question. The first time I went to Pyongyang was in 1998. Coming into the city from the airport, it was as if a neutron bomb had exploded. There were literally no people anywhere along the highway into the city, and no cars, except for ours, on the road. In the city, buildings seemed deserted; you couldn't see people on the street. Traffic police were stationed at intersections, but there was no traffic. Occasionally, a bus would appear, but there were no cars. On the television, there were only two channels. Both played reports of Kim Il Song meeting world leaders. This was particularly creepy, since Kim Il Song had been dead for four years. Needless to say, television was not a means of entertainment.

Essentially, our U.S. delegation was under “hotel house arrest.” It was explained to us clearly that we could only wander outside the hotel for one block, and if we wished to do so, we had to stop off at the hotel's coffee shop, where there would be someone assigned to watch us at all times. If we wanted to go outside, we had to be escorted by the “minder.” Also, if we were to use the services of the minder, we had to provide the minder with a

meal, no matter what time it was. I thought this outrageous, so I remained in the hotel. Each year from 1998 to 2002 when I went back the city was becoming more populated, and things got more lively. By the last visit in 2002, things were almost normal. There were people on the streets, and people eating in restaurants.

Q: Well did you just sit around? There must have been other western or other guests in the hotel sitting around too.

MOHR: Yes, there were, and we would chat, so that was a bit of a diversion.

Q: What did you do, ordinarily, take a book?

MOHR: Yes, we read a lot. But during the day, we were in negotiations, and after work, there were usually official dinners. And each trip lasted only three-four days. I mean, no one wanted to spend an extended amount of time there. One time, I almost got in trouble. I brought a mystery book, set in South Korea. While reading it, I became alarmed that the plot involved a rogue Navy SEAL, who was employed by North Korea as a spy to discover the location of U.S. nuclear weapons in South Korea. I was afraid that if the North Koreans read the book—since I had no doubt that they searched our rooms while we were in negotiations—they would feign outrage and not let me leave. Fortunately, they never said anything about the book.

Q: But overall, you never could get close to them.

MOHR: That's correct. It was much like dealing with the Chinese in the 1970s. There was no real personal interaction.

Q: OK, when you left how did things stand with North Korea?

MOHR: By 2005, things were sort of in limbo, much in the same way as they are today. As I said, the North Koreans were in control again of their spent nuclear fuel, and were on their way to reprocessing it, extracting the plutonium, and testing nuclear weapons.

The only good thing about the situation was that we knew North Korea did not have the technology to miniaturize the nuclear bombs to fit their missiles. Thus, their nuclear weapons program did not represent an immediate threat because they had no delivery system for their weapons. Unfortunately, the Obama administration has too much on its plate now, with wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq, fighting Al-Qaeda, and dealing with Iran, to focus on North Korea. This is too bad. Now, I don't believe North Korea represents an international threat. The people who suffer most are probably the North Koreans themselves. The regime has made it clear that it cares about security and the military first, and if there is not enough food, and people starve, too bad. It is a tragic situation, and I wish the current administration would devote a little more attention to it.

Dealing with the Bush administration on North Korea helped me put my overall career in perspective. For most of my career, I dealt with China policy. We always had the support of the White House. I thought this was the norm, because I didn't know anything else. Dealing with the Bush administration on North Korea, I never had the support of the White House. I was tremendously frustrated and disappointed. But in looking back over my whole career, I realized how lucky I was. For the most part, I was allowed to contribute to the positive advancement and improvement of U.S.-China relations. When I started out, in the 1970s, there had been a war over Korea, and a war with Vietnam was in progress. Nixon established ties with China, and Carter normalized those ties, but who knew what would happen? Now, a third war in Asia, or a war with China, seems extremely remote, if not impossible. I am greatly satisfied with my career, even if the last few years working on North Korea produced no results.

Q: So in 2005, then what?

MOHR: I spent a few months unemployed (but still receiving my retirement check from State), and, as noted above, signed on with the Wilson Center, doing work on northeast Asia. I did that for three years, and then retired for good in 2008. Now I teach English three times a week to immigrant groups, one to Chinese retirees, one to recent Korean

immigrants to the U.S., and one to pre-kindergarten Hispanic children, ages 3-5. It's a nice balance.

I'm also studying Italian. I went to Italy last year for the first time with my wife, and we're planning on spending two weeks in Florence this spring. I spent most of my life studying about East Asia, and now I want to learn a little bit about western civilization. I think I'll start with the Italian Renaissance. I also work out at a local health club two to three times a week. About two years ago, I gained a considerable amount of weight, and reached 210 lbs. (I am 5'11" tall.) My doctor said unless I lost weight, I would soon develop Type II diabetes. That was certainly a wake-up call, so I went on a diet, and lost 35 pounds. And I have been able to hold that weight loss. I am also helped by my wife, who is very supportive.

I found that I really don't miss the foreign service all that much, and enjoy being retired. Of course, we spend as much time as possible visiting the grandchildren: my daughter, who is a pediatrician, is married and lives in the Boston area. She has two children, Will who is seven, and Lily who is four. My son, who has a Ph.D. in African anthropology and teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, is married and has one son, who is two. My grandchildren are all very cute, and all the wonderful things people say about being a grandparent are true.

Well, that's about it.

Q: Great.

End of interview